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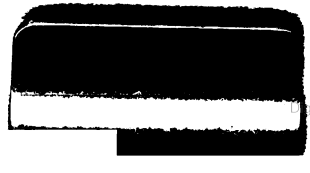

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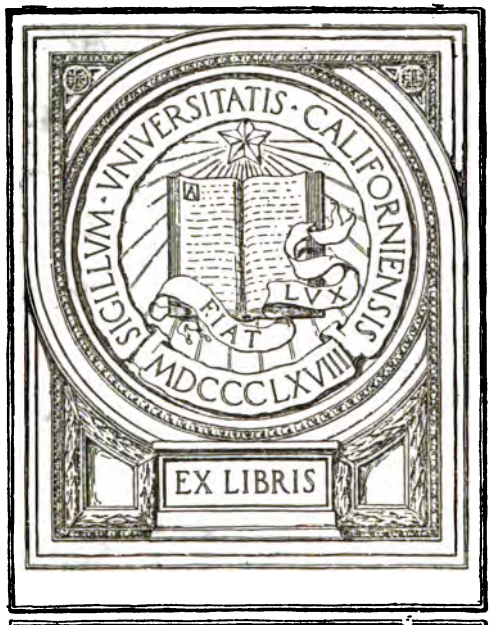

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I I S

QUOS AMAVI ET PERDIDI

QUOS AMO

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". . . Carry me out
Into the wind and into the sunshine,
Into the beautiful World. . . ."

W. E. HENLEY.

First Published in 1920

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CONTENTS

PART I

THE POWER OF ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN	13
II.	THE DEATH OF MARY	34
III.	A CHILD OF THE ALPS	44
IV.	SEBASTIAN	64
V.	IN THE VILLAGE OF TRINS	72
VI.	ON THE ALP	88
VII.	SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE	102
VIII.	THE LITTLE WHITE PILLAR	122
IX.	CONEYHURST	130

PART II

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHILD TO WOMANHOOD

X.	THE BACKFISCH	140
XI.	COMING HOME	148
XII.	THE DANCE	157
XIII.	THE GATES OF ITALY	167
XIV.	AWAKENED	176
XV.	THE GIRL'S BROKEN MIRROR	187
XVI.	THE VILLA AT PLURS	192
XVII.	VENICE	209
XVIII.	SEHNSUCHT	218

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CHAPTER
XIX. THE
XX. CARD
XXI. THE
XXII. THE
XXIII. THE
XXIV. FIRST LOVES - - - - - 286
XXV. THE WISDOM OF SEBASTIAN - - - 292
XXVI. IN THE GARDEN OF LOVE - - - - 305
XXVII. AFTERTHOUGHTS - - - - - 309
XXVIII. THE SORROW OF LOVE - - - - 321
XXIX. THE HOME OF SEBASTIAN - - - - 331
XXX. "LONG AGO" - - - - - 344

AFTER FIVE YEARS - - - - 356

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younger daughter, Mary, was a girl of nineteen summers. The son, who was now an undergraduate at Magdalen, had caught some violent chill a few days earlier in Italy, and this chill had not been lessened by driving over the St. Gothard in a heavy rainstorm. At Andermatt he became much worse, but his father, anxious to carry out the carefully prepared scheme of his driving journey, and knowing that they would join the railway if only they could push on as far as Chur that night, started at dawn across the Oberalp.

The family travelled in style, as families of their social standing often did in those times. They drove in an immense barouche which they chartered on the other side of the Alps, with a courier who smoothed down all the rubs for Mr. Crane, and with a lady's maid who kept the long skirts of his daughters duly dusted. They had quantities of veils, air-cushions, and white umbrellas; but no amount of luxury could lessen the ache in the young man's head as they wound down the pass in the late afternoon, and Sebastian declared he could go no farther.

Upon consulting with his courier, Mr. Crane found that although the inn at Ilanz was by no means of a first-class order, it yet could contain their party for a night or two with tolerable, if not luxurious, comfort; and to this inn they accordingly went. An hour later they were established there—Sebastian in a dark, cool room with very little furniture, and only fresh linen and bare parquet floor to recommend it; Mr. Crane and Mr. and Mrs. James in the panelled sitting-room; and Mary sitting silent at the table near her brother's bed.

Mary was a sweet-faced English girl. In physique she was slight, dark and delicate, like her brother; in mind she was more orthodox. Indeed, she had a very rigid code of morals for one so young; and her religion was almost that of a Christian saint some hundreds of years ago. Her convictions of redemption and of grace were strong and

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sure; her conscience would have been wellnigh morbid but for the depth of human love which governed all her thoughts and actions. Combining with this purely Christian faith, but never for one moment clashing with it, was a strong love of art, of nature, and of merely sensuous beauty in all things natural and human. In fact, Mary Crane was both an artist and a poet in that peculiar way in which so many women are artists and poets. But the fact of this rather antagonistic vein never rose sufficiently near to the surface to obstruct her prim outward life; it was tucked well away in some corner of her inward consciousness. Mary was very glad and proud to be accepted as the mistress of her father's respectable mansion at an early age; and before she really had "grown up," before she had left the rigid discipline of the schoolroom and of her excellent Swiss governess, she had already, in her quiet, modest fashion, attempted to fill the place which her dead mother had, with such spasmodic grace, filled there before her. The large establishment of servants, which Mr. Crane felt fitting for himself and for his children, acquiesced with signal satisfaction in this new régime; for Mary's rule was mild and sweet, and never for one instant did any spark of revolution on her part obtrude itself upon the even surface of that late Victorian home. All the same, the seeds of revolution were there; and Mary's calm concealed a fire of smouldering logs within.

The elder sister, Mrs. James, was completely different to Mary. She was the pride and joy of all her aunts. She possessed a distinctly normal, if a little freakish, form of mind; but her "eccentricities," for so she herself had always termed her whims, were really perfectly conventional. She had many admirers, and at the age of twenty-two she married the only one of them for whom she had ever felt even a spark of energetic affection. The marriage gave the most general satisfaction, for it had everything to recommend it: Mr. James was rich and prosperous, a hard-working business man likely to be proud of any family

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which he, combining with his wife, produced. Mr. James's forbears had long been the possessors of land in a beautiful part of Southern Wales, where a huge family mansion had grown up in the late Georgian days on the site of a former manor house. He spent a certain period of his life in this great and rather pompous house, but the bulk of his time was passed in the town of R——, where Mr. Crane himself had always lived.

The Jameses had three children; two girls and a boy. Could they but have produced one other son their happiness would have been complete. But the family ceased at that point, and perhaps this produced just a little peevishness in the mother, and a touch of resentment in the father; but this was nothing at all to signify, for all things else went well with them.

"They have sold their souls to the Commonplace, and they batten in the purple of Bourgeoisie," Sebastian had once rather flippantly explained, when asked by a friend to describe the household of his elder sister.

But Mary, as I have said, was different. She loved her brother, who was also different, with a love that amounted to passion; and it was his influence which drove her into the study of books beyond her power to comprehend, and into a love of beauty in art which was inclined to clash with her religious sentiments. It was Sebastian, I may add, who often saved her from becoming a possible prig at a very early age.

Mary's father, himself a busy man in his day, though having for some years retired from active work, found all his "relaxation" in those things which, if regarded as merely a diversion to himself, had become the very soul's food of his two younger children. Mr. Crane was rich, and he was popular; in his day it was a virtue and not a vice to exert all sorts of harmless patronage; so he was much adored by various paupers and all the "charitable institutions" in the town. He and his family led an admirably well-regulated, if unexciting, existence. But

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they were stifled rather than stimulated by all their possessions, and this was the unconscious root of Mary's trouble.

Foreign travel was in the days of Mr. Crane a very different thing indeed from what it was even some ten years later. The very name they gave to it: "A tour on the Continent"—will explain what I mean. The Alps may have been the "Playground of Europe" then, but the clothes of the ladies and gentlemen who arrived to "play" there would be reckoned as almost grotesque and intensely unsuitable by the people of an equal social standing who, twenty or thirty years later, poured into the beautiful and holy places for purposes which they described as sporting. When Mr. Crane reached a foreign city, he took a suitable carriage, and he visited first every object of art which the city contained, and then the shops which sold reproductions of this art, specimens of which he purchased with a taste considered good in its day, but which would be labelled as rococo in ours. In this fashion his English home had become a sort of museum of bronzes, pictures, cabinets, mosaic tables, marbles, and such solid things as the modern traveller has neither cash nor inclination to secure. We may laugh a little at the incongruity of such a museum nowadays, but there is still much to be said for the effect of comfort and dignity which it was able to produce.

Mr. Crane greatly enjoyed his journeys, but Sebastian kept but a very mixed remembrance of their pleasures, for he suffered from a bodily fatigue such as his father, who himself possessed an almost metallic physique, could not conceive of; and the long diaries which he compelled himself to keep, exhausted and forced into further expression a brain already overstrained. Mary, on the other hand, enjoyed every hour of her travels. She was older than her brother; her brain was emptier and her heart fuller. Her religion, too, was more convincing.

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One year they went to Chamouni and to the Bernese Oberland, returning home by the Lake of Geneva. It was a sort of a chromo-lithograph Switzerland which they visited, and of which they really got no true impression. But Mary loved it; and on her mantelpiece at home she kept an exquisite copy of a Swiss châlet—not a thing which peasants are born and die in, but an ideal image of this thing, and Mary loved ideals. She also treasured a finely carved chamois on a little oaken pedestal; a goat, a marmot, too; and when she thought about the Alps she seemed to hear the alpenhorn; and she could see small children running out to meet her with long baskets full of strawberries. And there was always an afterglow on the Jungfrau, when Mary remembered Interlaken.

This, then, being the mode of travelling in Mr. Crane's family, it may well be imagined with what consternation a stay of some days in a very small Swiss town would fill their orderly minds. But Sebastian had fever, it was unwise, it would indeed have been impossible, for them to push on to Chur; and so they settled down in the not very clean and decidedly dreary inn, prepared to make the best of a rather bad matter. They spread themselves over the empty rooms, and although it was August, they lighted a fire in the stove of the sitting-room: "To air it, you know," said Mrs. James, ignorant as she mercifully was of a procession of commercial travellers who had immediately preceded her on the spot. The courier brought up their book-box from the hall, and covered the table with books and with papers. Somehow the pretty English things, notably Mrs. James's embroidery frame, looked a little incongruous amongst the stuffed marmots and the chamois on the walls of the inn. But Mr. Crane got out a local guide-book, and he found that the Romanish language was still spoken and even preached in the neighbourhood of Ilanz. He discovered other facts, too, about the flora and geology of the district; and, in the character of a good

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traveller, he managed to whip up some small form of interest in his unwelcome surroundings.

Then the doctor was announced. He was a young man, tall, and with a singularly grave and calm expression. His clothes were those almost of a peasant, but there was a dignity and a reserve about him which astonished the English family. He did not speak to Mrs. James, but he bowed to Mr. Crane, and asked to see his patient. Having heard what he wanted to know, he went upstairs without waiting for anyone to go with him.

Mary heard a step on the stairs, and she got up and went to the door. The light of the afternoon sun came in through a window on the landing and fell upon her pale and rather nervous face. She was exquisitely dressed in the full fashion of her day. A light grey silk with a little lilac sprig fell full from her waist to the floor, and at her neck she wore a small amethyst cross on a heavy golden chain. Her hair was parted, and brushed very smoothly back over large pads from her temples. Her whole outward being was marked by a sort of exquisite refinement. The peasant doctor stopped at the head of the stairs; perhaps the pallor of the young girl struck him.

"Are you the one who is ill?" he asked her in almost perfect English, but yet almost unconscious he had spoken.

More than that he did not say, but he fell in love with Mary Crane. He fell in love with her, suddenly, profoundly, and quite irrevocably, as a man of only his character can and will do.

"No," said Mary very simply. "It is my brother who is ill; he is, I think, in very great pain. I am glad you should have come so soon."

Then the doctor passed by her and into Sebastian's room. Once he turned to Mary:

"Are you going to nurse your brother?" he asked; and Mary said she hoped he soon would be quite well again.

"Your brother is ill—he may be very ill indeed," said

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the young doctor. He had all the calm and candour of his race, for the people with whom he lived and dealt never attempted to hide or to ignore their ills.

Then Mary started forward to meet her father, who had also come into the room:

"Hush, my dear!" he said, as she began to speak. "Just stay with your brother whilst we go down to talk together."

In spite of the shock which the doctor's words had given to Mary, a strange sense of comfort and of confidence had also come to her since first she saw him. She smoothed out Sebastian's sheet, and took the book and began again to read to him.

Sebastian's illness was not mortal. There was high fever and a touch of pneumonia, but these passed; the village doctor was wise, and the case was taken in time. All the same, the English family and their elaborate paraphernalia remained for over a month in the inn at Ilanz. It was gorgeous summer weather, and every day the valley, and the mountains up above it, blazed and glowed. The fruit ripened in the orchards, the yellow berries turned orange on the banks of the Rhine. The little town was rather quiet, because the cows were away on the higher pastures, and many of the inhabitants had gone with them. The days were hot, but there was always a cold breath from the river which flowed under the covered wooden bridge outside the inn; and at night a faint, delicious scent came up from the fields, and down from the pastures on the distant mountain-sides, to freshen, as it were, the burning valleys.

Mary Crane was happy—she was happier than she had ever been before. It was as though unconsciously some hitherto unnoticed manuscript had been unrolled from her inmost soul and shown to her outward eyes. On its pages, as she read, new truths, which did not clash with the old ones she had known in youth, came up and dazzled her.

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Mechanically she read, and gradually it dawned on her that "abroad" was a very different place to the false chromo-lithograph which she had printed of it in her early journeys. She saw that Switzerland was not a land of alpenhorns and afterglows, but a place where men and women struggled, loved, hated, and suffered, very much as they did elsewhere, but perhaps more silently and fiercely. Mary no longer bought the Alpine strawberries from little dressed-up children, but she went to the damp woods in the afternoon, when Sebastian was sleeping, and she found them growing amongst the granite boulders, or the trunks of old dead trees in hidden forests.

Then, one day, she realized that the model châlet upon her chimneypiece at home was but a very poor affair, and not at all the house which peasants live, and work, and die in.

It was a Saturday morning. Sebastian was better, and lay on the sofa; on Monday they all were expecting to leave and to go back to England. Mary sat at the table sewing. Mr. Crane had got out his Tennyson, and was reading the "Palace of Art" aloud to his two children. This poem had always appealed to Sebastian, but to-day it appeared that Mary, too, had got a new light upon it. Sebastian, who was sensitive, was fully alive to the whole situation: "The floodgates of Mary's revolutionary temperament are about to burst through their dams," he had said to himself that morning, and, because he was young, and, like other young people, just perhaps a little bit cruel when unduly excited, he awaited events with an eager interest.

There was a step on the stairs and the doctor came into the room. He looked rather pale, but he was so naturally strong, and his skin so burned by the weather, that only a very near friend would have noticed the change about him. Having spoken to Sebastian, the young man turned to Mary.

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"You said the other day you would like to go into a peasant's house," he said slowly and very directly. "My house is, I think, the typical home of a peasant. My mother would be pleased if you—or any of you"—he turned to Mr. Crane—"would visit us there to-day. I have my carriage, and I could take you there and drive you back in the cool of the evening."

Mary had coloured deeply with the repetition of the word "peasant." She blushed, indeed, so painfully that she arose to hide her confusion. She could almost have cried, but she knew not what it was she wished to cry about. Sebastian knew, but Mr. Crane had noticed nothing, and he hastened to accept an invitation which attracted him merely by its novelty. He was acquainted with many doctors in his own country—doctors with grand town houses and country doctors, too—men both good and bad. This young man, who was not in the very least like any one of them, had pleased and attracted him from the first by a certain surprising simplicity, courtesy, and practical directness which, as he now knew well, were combined with a deep medical skill.

They started at two o'clock in a small country chaise, which shook and jolted over the cobble-stones in the street. The doctor sat on the box and drove, answering thence, as best he could, the elaborate questions of Mr. Crane. Mary sat perfectly still and silent. She wore a large Leghorn hat with a white velvet ribbon, and a white muslin gown; her skin was flushed by the hot summer air; she was radiantly lovely.

When they reached the village of Trins the doctor drew up in front of a large house, built partly of stone and partly of wood, on the outskirts of the village and opposite the church. He handed Mary down from the carriage, and they all went up the steps and into the sitting-room.

The doctor's house was a peasant's house; his people were peasants, but they had their pedigrees and their

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coat-armour like other peasants of the Grisons, and their lives, though excessively simple, were governed by a sort of grim courtesy common to all old breeding. The doctor's mother received them—a reserved old woman in a stiff homespun gown, and a black lace cap or bonnet; she told them to be seated in the panelled room. An exquisite linen cloth, with a fringe of the finest lace like that of the sheets upstairs, was spread upon the table; some finely painted china cups, a glass dish full of honey and another of raspberry jelly were set out upon it. They did not talk very much because Mary was shy of speaking in German, and the doctor always spoke in English, but she smiled a great deal at the old peasant-woman. She went round the room and looked at the pretty carved cupboards, the chairs, the serpentine stove, the polished pewter cans and dishes.

"It's all so beautiful," she said to the doctor. But the young man only bowed a little stiffly.

"It is perfectly simple," he said. "We have nothing that we do not need, and that we cannot use."

And as he spoke Mary remembered the great drawing-rooms in her own home—the heavy pieces of furniture, the mirrors, chandeliers, and velvet cushions. She had a vision of the splendid busts and pictures; the great portfolios, too; and, above all, of the endless books—things which, if useful (and she formerly had believed them to be so), were only useful to the mind of a man, and not to his outward life.

A question arose in her breast: it stifled Mary Crane.

And as she thought about these things, the peasant doctor thought about them too. He had been in England and had seen rich, overladen houses; he did not care about them, but neither did he condemn them. A pain, a struggle, came into his heart, for he saw the sorrow in the young girl's eyes, and he paused to show her something which might please her. He took from the shelf his mother's work-box.

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"You may like to look at this," he said, "for it is a beautiful piece of work. My father carved it for my mother when they were betrothed." The box was made of larch-wood; it had a wreath of inlaid flowers round about it; and in the lid, as you opened it, was seen a little bit of looking-glass, and two hearts joined by a delicate arrow with the initials of the man and the woman he loved carved underneath it.

"My father was a very good carpenter," said the young man quietly. "Do you like this thing?"

"Like it!" said Mary, and that was all. She had suddenly grown afraid of the doctor. He saw this and felt pained.

"Is there anything else you would care to see?" he asked her gently.

"Nothing—no, nothing, thank you," said Mary.

The tears came into her eyes, she did not try to hide them. She stood quite still in the middle of the room, and something in the quiet shade of its woodwork seemed to heighten the tone of her exquisite beauty.

The doctor looked at her and turned away.

But Mr. Crane saw none of these things; he was busily engaged in examining a print on the wall, the only decoration of the peasant sitting-room. The print was not a very good one—some travesty of bible history—but Mr. Crane was glad to talk about it, for he and his hostess had very little else in common.

Then Christina, the doctor's sister, came in with the coffee which she had made herself. The sun was setting behind the mountains; they opened the shutters, and all sat round the table in the window in the delicious cool of evening. Mary began to feel herself again. She was sitting on a wooden bench by the window, and she could look down into the garden and the fruit-trees, to the church and the mountains beyond. "You have roses in your garden," she said timidly in German to Christina, and the peasant-girl smiled kindly.

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"Shall we go and pick some roses?" she suggested. And the two girls went together out by the street and into the tiny garden. There were many flowers in Christina's garden, and she picked a great many for her guest, and tied them in a stiff little bunch, with a fringe of southernwood, lavender, and other herbs around it.

The doctor sat by the window and watched the girls, and the more he watched the paler and the sadder did he seem to grow.

When the time came for going the doctor explained that he could not accompany them—someone was ill in the village, he said, and he must go there; he had ordered a carriage from the inn to take them back to Ilanz. He helped Mary into the carriage; she had got her bunch of herbs and flowers pressed tight against her breast. Her father made some kind but rather courtly speeches.

"Till to-morrow then," he said, and explained to Mary that the doctor had promised to take them on Sunday to hear his cousin preach in a little Lutheran church near Ilanz.

Then Mary smiled again.

When they reached the inn it was dark, and a great planet was shining above the Rhine and reflected in one of its pools. Sebastian was reading in his room; he looked up suddenly and stared at Mary. Mary was very pale; she scarcely seemed to see him.

"It's done," said her brother to himself—"it's done, and she'll marry the vet!" His eyes had a kindly light in them. By the people of his native town he had always been considered a "very peculiar young man."

Sunday morning dawned, hot and splendid. Mary got up from her bed of dreams, and, dreaming still, she dressed and went down to breakfast. Very soon after a carriage arrived at the inn. The doctor came up the stairs to fetch them, and they all drove away up the valley. The silence was deep like the silence of any Sunday in any

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land. They arrived rather late at the church, which was crowded. But the people made room, and Mary was given a seat away from the rest of the party, and far up the aisle, amongst the schoolchildren. She knelt for a while quiet at her prayers, and then sat back on the rough log of wood which served as a bench to the children of Trins. There was quite a crowd of men in the congregation, which proved the fame of the preacher. The morning was very hot, and the doors of the tiny church stood open wide. A belated bird was singing of love in the big pear-tree outside the churchyard gate; the air seemed to seethe in the sunlight, and the scent of roses and of pinks, which grew on the graves outside, crept round the shadows of the church in puffs of heated air.

Then a stir in the congregation announced the approach of the preacher, and a huge man entered with the sunlight and strode up the narrow aisle. His head was thrown back, and the sun behind him made a glory of his hair. He was magnificent in all the strength of his manhood. In the whole personality of the village preacher there was not one vestige of that emaciation connected with Christian saints. But Pfarrer Caflisch was indeed no saint, and his beauty was markedly that of the perfect human animal. Under one arm he carried his book, the other hung at his side, the fist tight closed. His thick black Lutheran gown flowed back from his shoulders, displaying to the full his tall athletic figure. With the stride of an unconquerable athlete he went straight up the pulpit stairs, then stood there awhile gazing with a gaze of defiant love upon the assembled people.

Mary Crane watched with a mixture of wonder, of joy, and of awed surprise, the face of the preacher; for at that moment in her life it seemed to explain and to pardon the trouble in her own soul. He, too, looked suddenly at her, and then in a voice of thunder he said, "Let us sing," and he gave the first line of the hymn which began with:

"I am a guest on earth."

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The service then went on—the prayer, for which the people stood, the hymn, which they sang sitting. There was a lengthy pause in which the preacher seemed to be searching every face in the whole congregation. His final gaze rested on Mary Crane, and he gave out the text of his sermon:

"'God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in TRUTH,'" he read.

The preacher's voice was clear and thrilling, full and very deep, too. It struck some chord in the hearts of men rather than in their souls. Mary listened intently, almost breathlessly. She was pained, and yet she felt pacified; her conscience was hurt, and yet she rejoiced. She realized that the religion of the preacher was not her own religion; it was not that of her father, nor indeed of anything which she herself had hitherto held dear. Yet it answered a thing in her own soul which before had only pained her in her dreams—a thing which she connected with Sebastian, and with the new learned freedom of the mountains—a thing . . .

She leaned forward earnestly; she almost rose to catch the last few words. The preacher was quoting a German poet:

"'Der Mensch ist frei geschaffen—ist frei,
Und wär er in Ketten geboren,'"*

he said.

Then there was silence, a prayer, the last verse of the hymn, and Mary rose to go. Someone was standing beside her in the aisle amongst the children. "Der Mensch ist frei—ist frei—and thou too—thou too," the preacher muttered. Mary dropped her eyes as they met the gaze of this powerful man. She hurried to the door, and out to the air and her people.

Her father was waiting for her; he looked rather pale

* Man is created free—he is free
And even were he born in chains.

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and tired. "Come," he said, "we have certainly heard a new sort of teaching. We will take some coffee in the inn before we leave."

"Ah," said his daughter, scarcely breathing, and paying no attention to his first remark, "then we may stay a little longer here—we need not hurry away just now?" She stooped to gather a bit of periwinkle by the graves, and nervously pulled it to pieces. "Papa," she said as they walked down the road, "what did you think of the sermon?"

"Interesting, remarkably interesting," said her father rather dryly. "I am afraid the young man will get himself into trouble with doctrines such as these."

"Did you not like what he said?" Mary hazarded.

"No, my dear. We need a more firm and a more ideal creed than his, as far as I can judge, to live by."

"*I* liked it," said Mary very low. "I should like to tell him so."

Her father hardly heard her, and hurried her on to the inn, where his eldest daughter and her husband were already seated in the parlour before some cakes and coffee. The sermon could scarcely be discussed there, for Mr. James understood not one word of German, and his wife was no scholar and certainly no theologian. She contented herself by saying that the preacher was "a very quaint young man."

Mary sat down at the table, but her heart and soul were elsewhere.

"For what time did you order the carriage?" she asked.

"I told them to come in half an hour."

"It is very hot in this room," said Mary. She rose and went out on the balcony. She stood a minute wondering to herself. The doctor followed her. There was a strange, calm look in his face—a sort of determined sadness.

"I think," he said, "that you would like to know my cousin, and to talk to him about his preaching."

Mary looked up at him, but she only said "Thank you."

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Then the doctor went back to the room and asked Mr. Crane if he might take Mary down to the Pfarrhaus.

Mary gathered up the dainty skirts of her muslin gown. They neither of them spoke. They walked very quietly down the village street. Some young men were playing at skittles by the inn, a cart rattled over the cobble-stones, and the water fell in splashes from the pump in the square. The air was very hot, and dry, and still; the unripe fruit showed pale and crude against the green on the pear-trees.

How deep—how strangely deep did all these then half-noticed details engrave themselves upon the mind of Mary Crane!

They went through the open door of the Pfarrhaus, and they passed through the courtyard into the garden. The preacher was sitting on a bench in the shadow of a pear-tree, and his bees were humming around him. He wore no hat, there was something of open air and a large human kindness in his face. He did not get up from the bench, but he looked at his cousin the doctor, and then at the English girl, and he turned the pages of his book, and, taking his pencil, marked a text.

Mary came near him: "I wanted to tell you, before I went away, that I liked your sermon," she began with a faint hesitation. "I liked it, I think, because it was like something I have sometimes thought about and have not dared to dream of." She blushed. "At least," she added, "I have always lived in England and gone to the same church, and you did not say things in the way that I have always heard them in my English church."

Her words were lame enough, but the two men understood her. The doctor had sat himself down on the bench. He did not look at Mary. He was young, but he seemed to be growing suddenly old. He had clasped his hands between his knees, and, leaning forward, he looked with a sort of dumb anguish into the leaves of the pear-tree.

"I wanted to ask you——" Mary went on. "Oh,

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there are so many things that I should like to know about!"

The preacher arose. He took Mary's hand and looked into her eyes. "My child," he said, "I know what it is that you want to know about; but it is not what you think. It has nothing to do with the so-called religion that we preach about in churches. You yourself are your religion—I see it in your eyes. You want to know a thing of life. Ask him there—ask my cousin." The clergyman dropped her hand. "Read what I have marked in this book," he said; "and now may God Almighty bless you."

He left them and hurried away to the house.

* * * * *

Then the doctor got up and he came and he stood before Mary. He took off his hat and he bowed his head before her.

"Forgive me," he said very simply, "but I love you. I had thought I would never tell you this, but now it is not possible for me. I shall always love you, but do not let this trouble you. Forgive me—I think I pain you." He put out his hand, as though he were about to say good-bye to Mary, but she did not take it. She picked up the book that the preacher had left on the grass. It was a copy of the New Testament printed in the Romanish language.

"What does this sentence mean that he marked?" she asked him tremulously. The doctor took the book from her hand. In a low voice which he could barely master he read aloud:

"'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.'"

Late that evening the doctor drove back to Ilanz. He went straight to Mr. Crane and he told him that he loved his daughter Mary. Mr. Crane was confounded; indeed, considering how true and sensible a man he was, he may be said to have been inordinately displeased.

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"Have you spoken to my daughter?" he asked.

"I told her that I loved her," the young man answered simply; "I was driven to do this by the impulse of a minute. I should not have done so had I not lost control of myself."

"And my daughter?"

"Said nothing," answered the doctor. "I have come to-night," he continued resolutely, "to tell you this, and to say good-bye to your daughter. You imagine, and perhaps naturally, that my social position is unworthy of you; I am poor in your eyes; in those of my people and in my own path of life I am not poor. I have enough to live with on my own land, enough for a wife of my own sort."

He paused: though his words were cold, his heart seemed stiffening with its own heavy pain.

"My daughter, . . ." began Mr. Crane.

"Forgive me," interrupted the doctor. "I fancy that I love your daughter deeply enough to understand her. Perhaps I have wronged her. I saw at once that in her nature there was a thirst for the very things you dread for her—for a natural life, for the life of a woman like the women of these mountains. I saw in her the seeds of a revolt from the life of culture and of comfort she had been brought up in, and——"

Again Mr. Crane was about to interrupt, but the doctor made a sign and continued: "I invited her to my home. I knew that it would please her. It did. In spite of all these things I love her well enough to leave her. It is no wish of mine to injure her by the rough contact of a life so different."

Then the doctor sat down, and for an instant his face went into his hands. When he looked up it was pale and drawn.

"May I see her?" he asked.

Mr. Crane hesitated.

"Oh, do not be afraid," said the doctor. "I have no

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single thing to say to her that you may not hear, or that could hurt her."

The following morning the Crane family left Ilanz; and one year later Mary married the peasant doctor.

"Poor Mary's neuropathy took the form of marriage," Sebastian said. He was the only person who showed some hopefulness and kindness in the matter.

Mary married her husband against her father's advice, against her sister's and her aunt's—almost against her own most certain faiths. The simple force of the young man's passion; the, to her, æsthetic charm of his surroundings and his people, combined to play on some painfully emotional chord inherent in her nature. She, the gentle English girl, brought up in all the cotton-wool of well-bred comforts and refinement, took upon herself to go into the "wilderness"; not into that old-fashioned tourist Switzerland of the afterglow and the alpenhorn, but into the life of a woman with a man in a remote and unknown region of the Alps.

Once again during the short days of their last courtship the doctor drew himself together and urged the possible pain of her new life with him upon the English girl. It was a Sunday evening in July; they were sitting on the terrace in Mary's old home. She had on the muslin gown she had worn in the Lutheran church that other Sunday morning, but there was a bunch of English jasmine in her breast.

"Think," he said, "think while yet there is time. How will you dare such things for me? How will you marry me?"

Mary gave him her hand.

"I will do it," she answered, "just as I always have, and always will, believe in God."

She went to her room; the Raphael Madonna hung over her bed and the model châlet stood on the chimney-

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piece. Down in the town the bells were ringing for evening service; Mary had loved the Sunday bells in other times, this night she shut the window that she might not hear them—they belonged so absolutely to something of prehistoric drowsy peace in her past life, something which clashed and clanged with the novel creed of love and freedom that possessed her now.

Yet the mind of the man she was going to marry was the purest, holiest thing she ever knew.

So Mary and the doctor went to learn life together in the peasant house at Trins, and there, as Sebastian rightly or wrongly said, his sister "died of the experiment." The year was like a dream to Mary, an awakening to things she barely understood, a realization of a life in nature, a pageant of snowstorms, of spring and of blossom, of summer in the Alpine meadows, and of a strong and good man's love. Before she died she wrote in her bible: "To my child," and under it the text from Revelations, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Did Mary foresee the struggle in the life of her unborn child?

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CHAPTER II

THE DEATH OF MARY

"Les fleurs se mêlent à toutes les catastrophes de la vie. . . .

"Il y avait une ironie atroce contre le deuil de ce moment, dans la sérénité du ciel, l'éclat du jour, le vert lumineux des arbres, les sourires des fleurs, le chant des oiseaux. Souvent la nature refuse de s'associer aux douleurs humaines, parceque souvent ces douleurs sont une ingratitude envers sa bonté. Elle crée les merveilles du ciel pour nous rendre heureux, nous évoquons les secrets de l'enfer pour brûler nos corps et nos âmes. La nature a raison de verser tant de raillerie sur nos volontaires douleurs."—*From "La Croix de Berny."*

It was snowing hard, yet this was almost a summer's day. The snow fell fast and thick in great watery flakes which melted as they touched the ground, but which, after the storm had lasted for an hour, grew firm and formed into an icy substance binding and bending the flowers and the mountain ashes, heavy as they were with summer leaf, more cruelly than the thickest snows of winter ever can do. It was just in the first week of September, and the garden where the flowers grew was full of radiant marigolds, pansies, and sweet bergamot—such things as can withstand the austerities of Alpine winters. The doctor's house was built of stone, roughly plastered, and painted beneath its overhanging eaves with little scrolls and bible texts; its roof was made of tiny planks, placed one above another, and these were secured against the winter hurricane by large stones set at equal distances. Small orange lichens and brilliant mosses had crept around the stones, and to these the snow clung lovingly, although it melted on the wooden planks, and ran in rivers through the crazy

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dragon's heads which served for water-spouts, and splashed to the street below. The house was eminently a friendly one, large and spacious. At its back a big barn spread to the hillside, and thence in all this snowstorm a strong delicious scent of grass and withered salvias came out in heated whiffs to meet the frozen air. The bench by the front door was painted green; above it ran a little balcony, and here on all fine summer days there was always a splendid show of beautiful carnation flowers, falling in pink and crimson cascades from their wooden tubs. On cold days these plants were taken in; but now, in all the fullest glory of their bloom, they had been forgotten, and the snow fell thick and like a mask of death above their heavy flower heads.

"Ah, see!" said a peasant-girl who passed that moment up the street. "They have left the carnations out in all this weather! She must be very ill indeed, or they would never have forgotten the flowers."

"Yes," muttered her companion, sighing heavily as peasants often do rather than pass unnecessary comments.

He followed the girl, as if by instinct, into the house and up the steps which led to the balcony of the barn, and he helped to carry in the big round wooden tubs, and to put them carefully, side by side, on a chest in the hayloft. Then, standing by the ladder which led to the hay, whilst the girl almost reverently dusted the last of the snow from the carnations, he ventured on a statement.

"They say she'll likely die," he volunteered.

"It's very likely," said the girl. She was not unkind, she was, indeed, very fond of the mistress of the house; but she had the calm of her country and its full power of resignation.

"What will the doctor do if that is so?" suggested the young man after another pause.

The girl was picking some dead heads off the cloves, She appeared not to hear his question, or anyhow she did not answer it.

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"There's the post!" she said.

"The post!" repeated her companion. And the word seemed to contain for him some form of magic, as no doubt it does for the inhabitants of every lonely village in any rather isolated valley.

"There's another carriage," said the young man.

"And luggage—strangers' luggage," added the girl. They had gone to the side of the barn, and they were looking out between the chinks in the log wall at the back. They must both have had the sight of young hawks, for the carriage road winds along the side of the hill some forty feet or more from the doctor's house at Trins, the snow was falling thicker than ever, and an inexperienced person could not possibly distinguish between a diligence and a landau, still less between the ordinary parcels and strangers' luggage, on that dim afternoon.

"I'll be going on to see who's in the post-carriage," said the young man. "How it snows! This will harm the second hay crop. It's good the cows are down from the Alp. If it clears she may get better. She——"

"She's a good lady," interrupted the girl, "but she never was strong enough. She's not made as we are. She tried, but——"

The girl never finished her sentence. A long low wailing cry, like the sound of some weak thing in pain, broke through the stillness of the snowy air.

"Ah! Mother of Pity!" murmured the girl, and covered her eyes. But the man went out and on up the street.

* * * * *

The clouds parted suddenly and a great glory of sunlight flashed forth on that white world. Into this pure light, through the narrow window of the doctor's house, one of the strongest, and yet most sweet, of modern souls passed forth to the unknown; and, watching it go, her husband stood, strong, calm, and vigorous, but silent with the silent strength of Death.

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A little old peasant-woman was sitting by the stove where she had sat for three days off and on. She was swaddling and caressing a tiny human being, whose big eyes blinked in the dazzling light, and whose expression was one of even more painful and preternatural knowledge than is common to all babies at their birth.

Between the man and the little old woman and the baby, there lay on the great carved bed the figure of a very young woman. She was dead. Death is ever a great healer, but around her mouth and on her forehead there lingered still the faintest of those lines which tell of mental struggle. Her eyes were closed in death, the lids were full and heavy; it needed not her husband's hand to close them, she being very weary. She was singularly beautiful; dark; and, to use the word in its best sense, romantic. Her lips, still slightly parted in a smile of vision, had, whilst life was in them, asked innumerable questions, the small hands had never lain so listless as they lay this evening under the sheet.

"Dead," said the doctor, speaking to himself. "Dead," he repeated.

His lips were white, and in his strength he trembled. He did not look back to the bed for a moment. For a little moment yet he shrank away from the anguish which he knew was coming on him.

"To see thee laugh," he said very quietly, "thou little fool of mine. To have thee for mine own—my very own—and then . . ."

He turned. With a calm which only the tortured know, he pushed the shutters of the window open wide, so that all the glow and the glare of the sunshine came in with a rush and flooded the panelled room. Then he went back to the bed, and sat beside her. He lifted the stiffening hands of his dead wife, and, bending down across her breast, he looked long and uninterruptedly upon her quiet face. He looked so long he seemed to dream, and the old village woman gathered up the child she had just swaddled

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and went down quietly to meet the other women gathered in the sitting-room.

Then the young man's head went down on the breast of the woman he had loved with all the passion of his life, and his sobbing shook the room.

* * * * *

In the meantime the diligence had drawn up before the village inn, and Mr. Crane and Sebastian stepped out into the slush of the street.

"The pity is, of course, that Mary has had such a struggle with her temperament in the past. And she had only just come into her real kingdom," Sebastian said, as though in continuation of some conversation he had been having with his father before their carriage stopped.

An expression of deeper pain came over Mr. Crane's face. He had the weary look of one to whom life's secrets have been laid bare by force of temperament rather than by merely painful circumstances.

"Forgive me," he said, addressing the landlord of the inn, who had come forward to welcome them, "but perhaps you can tell me of Frau Caflisch—she is my daughter, you know."

The man's face changed. "Yes, yes," he answered, hesitating. "She is very ill. It is but an hour since they told me she was dying."

"The doctor's wife is dead," said a woman who came up the street at that moment.

Mr. Crane and Sebastian turned in silence.

"My poor boy!" said the father, taking his son's arm. "This will be a great grief—your first great grief. For her husband I dare not even think; for myself. . . . But come, let us go to them."

Sebastian had turned white. He unconsciously took off his hat, and pushing his hair from his forehead, he walked bareheaded down the street. Young as he was, he was already a little bent about the shoulders, thin to emaciation, nervous in every limb and movement; and it was

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evident that thought had hitherto played a much larger part than action in his life. Occasionally he coughed a hard, nervous cough. When he spoke, he rather emphasized his words, choosing them with care and curious discrimination. His clothes had an old-world look about them, and hung rather than fitted to his boyish form.

Somehow every detail in the appearance of these two men clashed with the things around them. The snow was melting fast, and their more elaborate clothes gave them a peculiarly chilled and graceful look such as was wholly lacking in the peasant people round them; but the villagers, knowing beforehand of their trouble, lifted their hats, as though by some unconscious instinct, as they passed.

Mr. Crane paused before passing up the steps of the doctor's house. He, too, had uncovered his head, and it was easy to see he was praying. His son had not forgotten his grief, but, though he too paused, it was not to pray, but to read the motto which is painted under the roof of every good Swiss homestead:

> "'Ich leb'—weiss nicht wie lang
> 'Ich sterb,' und weiss nicht wann
> Ich fahr—weiss nicht wohin
> Mich wundert dass ich so fröhlich bin."

These were the words which were painted here. The young man repeated them in English, and then followed his father into the passage and up the stairs.

Christina met them on the landing; she was dressed in her stiff grey homespun, with a blue apron; her handkerchief had fallen from her head and lay knotted carelessly around her neck. She had been crying, but her face was calm, her voice was quite composed, it did not shake, nor did her hand falter as she came forward to meet the two men.

"My brother is in there now," she said, "but I think it may help him to speak to you. Mary died but a little while since. She suffered very much; it could not have

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happened otherwise, so we ought not perhaps to wish it. The baby is strong enough—just three days old. Mary never really saw it; she was so weak—she could not realize."

Christina was barely eighteen, yet she spoke in this calm, deliberate fashion about a tragedy not one hour old which she herself had lived through.

Mr. Crane held the banisters tightly. It was evident that he himself suffered a sort of torture; but he gathered himself together and spoke very gently to the peasant girl.

"Thank you, my poor child," he said. "And do not trouble for us. I see that you yourself are very tired. Will you not go and rest a little?"

"No, not now," the girl said very simply. "There's plenty to do still. . . . But come!"

She opened a door quietly, and the sound of a strong man sobbing came out into the passage where they stood. She went to the bed, and leaning down to her brother who knelt there, she whispered something in his ear. Whereat he stood up straight and turned towards the door.

The last rays of the September sun fell on the face of the small dead woman, and, through the window, all the glittering world of snow laughed as it were in delight.

Sebastian, with the unconscious eye of an artist, noted at once the harmony of the scene. He noticed his exquisite sister lying, still in death, upon the peasant bed; he noticed her husband, the simple and the noble mountain man, rugged, but tender too; he noticed his father, that creature of refinement and of culture, bending as though to comfort him; he noticed the passive peasant-girl as she reverently straightened the sheet.

And as he stood, a strange and novel feeling which he had not suspected, but which never again in all his life forsook him, rose up from some deep sources in his soul to strengthen his weak faith. Unconsciously the words he had always repeated for their harmony crept to his lips:

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"*For Thou sparest all, for they are Thine, O Lord! Thou lover of souls.*" Very gently he, too, went to the bed and gazed on the quiet face, and kissed the small cold forehead.

A faint sound of wailing came up through the boards from the room below. It was the cry of the little human being who had brought these men to sob and pray beside the mother. And yet her early loss most certainly fell heaviest upon this child itself?

So the doctor's house was full of pain; but beyond it, in the garden, the snow was melting fast away, and one by one, with quivering shocks and a sort of tremulous delight, the flowers were shaking themselves free from the frozen bondage of an hour. Pink sodden roses, and bergamot, rosemary, and Indian marigolds, sweet-scented mignonette, and purple pansies, stood free from their cold covering and turned to meet the sunset.

Then the mists arose from the valleys, too; they caught and uncurled in the forests as they passed to the tops of the mountains, they lingered round the highest of the peaks, then shook themselves finally free in flakes of gold as they vanished in thinnest air.

Once more the whole amazing Alpine world shone calm and free of tempest, and a young moon, following the wake of the sunset, touched with her thin horn the ridges of Calanda.

The first to turn away from the room was the youngest of the watchers. He went rather solemnly down the stairs and, guided by the baby's cries, he entered the lower living room.

"Is this the child?" he asked rather awkwardly.

Christina had followed him instinctively; she lifted a stiff little bundle of pink cotton out of its cradle and took it to the window. The wailing ceased, the tiny hands clutched angrily.

"It's a fine baby, a splendid little girl," remarked the old midwife from her seat beside the stove.

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"Yes," said the young man, "yes." He thought how red and ugly his small niece looked, but he did not say so. In a rather nervous way he looked once more; and a sense of piercing pity entered his heart, he scarce knew why. He never attempted to touch or to kiss the child; and very soon he left the room. As he passed through the door he met a little peasant-boy carrying a large bunch of roses and white sword-grass. "These are for the Frau Doktor," explained the child; "my mother sent them to her; but I picked them. See, this grass has cut my finger." A little blood had stained the white edges of the sword-grass. Then the peasant-boy went into the room, and looked for a while at the baby; he had little sisters of his own, and he seemed rather interested, for he stood very still with his legs apart, and smiled as though he were pleased, and poked with his hard fingers the tiny crumpled hand.

"Give the baby your roses, Basil," said one of the women; and the small boy paused a moment.

"No," he said, "they are for the Frau Doktor; my mother told me so."

"The dead need fewer flowers than the living," said a sententious old woman who had just come in.

For a long moment the peasant-child stood thinking. Then he threw the roses into the baby's cradle, rather grudgingly, and stumped out into the street.

Sebastian had gone down the steps and pushed in through the garden gate. He knew the garden of old; he was very fond of flowers, and he began to free some marigolds in a sheltered corner from their remaining cloak of snow, and to poke at the drowsy bumble-bee who had gone to sleep there. Then, as though he were suddenly exhausted, he sank on a bench in the summer-house, pulled from his pocket a little volume of Greek poetry, and began to read it earnestly.

* * * * *

Two days later Mary, the doctor's wife, was buried. The village choir sang around her grave; they sang a

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German and a Romanisch hymn in splendid well-trained voices. There was scarcely a breath of air, and not one single cloud in the September sky. The snow had vanished utterly, the valleys and the mountains teemed with a tender warmth. Far above on the mountain-sides an early frost had touched the bilberries; they ran like streams of blood between the scattered cembra pines.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help," read the Pfarrer, who spoke through his sobbing at the head of the grave. Then all the people went away, leaving the doctor standing alone, sad and stiff and quiet, in the evening sunlight. His father-in-law went back a little later and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Remember, my poor boy," he said, "that it is a higher Power than any we can understand which brings to us our joys and takes them from us—remember Him who suffered."

The doctor turned very swift and sudden. "I only remember *her*," he said. "What have I to do with this, your Man of Sorrows?"

"God help you—may God in His mercy help us all!" said the elder man, a little awed and pained.

"Of God we have yet very much to learn," the doctor answered slowly and with deliberation; but he had never in the whole of his life been rebellious before.

"One thing more," urged the Englishman. "You have your child. Through that small soul your joy may yet return to you?"

Then in silence he bowed his head to the grave, and went through the churchyard gate and on up the street. His child, he knew, lay dead behind him. An hour later he and his son were off on their way to England. And, as the months went by and the village life closed in again, the people forgot that men of such a different type had shared in their life that day.

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CHAPTER III

A CHILD OF THE ALPS

THE doctor never recovered the death of his wife, but contrary to what might have been imagined from the words spoken by her grave, he soon outlived his resentment at her loss, and in his wise, calm soul a feeling grew and strengthened concerning the ultimate blessing to himself of the one short year of married life. He never spoke about it, but it was always present with him, pacifying and purifying his already pure and peaceful nature. Concerning the child born of that marriage, the doctor's feelings were more mixed; but any doubts he may have entertained were not permitted to escape his inward consciousness, or to affect her natural childish growth in any way.

After the death of Mary, life fell very much into the old routine at the doctor's house—a routine only broken at rare intervals when any of the dead wife's family arrived to look at her child. Before the birth of her baby, and, indeed, during the whole of her short married life, Mary had written home to her people with an almost punctilious regularity, giving the minutest details of a life so amazingly novel to her. The letters were full of deep affection, but a half perceptible melancholy crept at times between the glowing description of the artist and of the young wife combined; and, towards the end, an almost passionate appeal was made that any child of hers should learn to live in, and to love, an English life; the appeal was coupled with the assurance that her husband felt as she did. Mary was a rich woman in her own right, for she had inherited wealth from her mother's side of the family;

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to these more eccentric persons something rare and unlike the Cranes in Mary's temperament, made singular appeal. This wealth descended to Linda, and of it Sebastian and the doctor were made the sole trustees. It was, therefore, in Sebastian's home, wherever that might be, that the little Swiss girl was to "learn" her English life.

In the meantime the offspring of this curious union lived happily in her Alpine home. She was a very attractive baby, with a great shock of dark hair and large dark eyes, and she grew into an equally attractive child, who appeared to accumulate, even as she unconsciously to herself demanded, all the flowers of life rather than its grasses. She was always small and slight, and she grew slowly. She was much absorbed in herself and her own immediate surroundings, and even at the early age of three years, she appeared to realize what a good world it was in which she had arrived to live. No one contradicted her much in this assumption, and as the grim looks and the whispered sorrows of her elders only struck her as passing shadows, she continued to exist and to flourish in her own world of unclouded contentment. She was never lonely, yet many children in her position might have been lonely. She was never for one moment either discontented or jealous. When, in later life, these two terrible qualities were forced upon her mind by others, they struck her down like physical illnesses. The essence of her whole existence appeared to be some form of self-sufficiency, of acceptance of good and happy and beautiful impulses, ignorant of all the things which go to counteract these in our misguided human world; and thus she confirmed to herself the belief of happiness in her own surroundings, and, being very young, she entirely overcame all adverse testimony. She sometimes flew into tempers, but she very rarely cried, and never expressed resentment in those early days. She saw very few strangers; when they came her way she would gaze at them with a curious happy stare, and then break

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out into a smile which, if they were genial people, made them catch her up and kiss her. Linda loved her father with a touch of awe, and she was never naughty with him; from him she had inherited her own strong faith in life—though a faith of a very different quality. They were friends at an early age; but there the matter ended; there was nothing at all exciting in their relationship, and Linda, unknown to herself, desired excitement. The doctor would never really understand that painfully intellectual nature which was so strong at the back of her being, and which only on very rare occasions in her early infancy took the form of irritable indignation at dull forms of opposition.

One strong influence in the child's life was that of her father's cousin, Pfarrer Caflisch, who lived in a neighbouring village, and continued to propound his free and very unorthodox doctrines even as he had done that day when Mary and her people visited his church. Pfarrer Caflisch was a very remarkable man. How he ever missed the stage and became a clergyman it is difficult to guess, although these professions are sometimes curiously allied. There is a great deal of freedom in the Lutheran Church, and very little of the strict following of creeds which afflicts one often in more outwardly elaborate forms of Church doctrine. Pfarrer Caflisch was essentially a vigorous and life-loving human being; he sought to fathom the hearts of his parishioners in their homes, in the Wirthschaft, and at the dance, rather than in the church. With their souls he only dealt on Sundays, and on those occasions, so great was the power of his eloquence, that he was able to overcome any unfavourable opinion his singular freedom of speech and behaviour might have made on them during the week. He had been known to say on Saturday night, when sitting rather late over a pack of cards and reproved by an older man, "What does it matter, my friend? I will set all your women a-weeping to-morrow as soon as I enter the pulpit." And he succeeded in doing so.

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Pfarrer Caflisch had the charm of a boundless and almost magnetic human sympathy; but he loved life and love better than he loved renunciation and religious devotion. His enemies interpreted this by saying that he loved "women and good living" better than the spiritual tending of his flock. Be that as it may, there was one thing certain about him—namely, the power of unfathomable kindness. The next most remarkable thing about him was the student. He was a real student, and when engaged in a study he worked like a demon to unravel thought. But he was not a literary man, and he was certainly no artist. Above his writing-table he had hung an immense picture of the head of Christ. It was a terrible and hideous, an intensely painful portrait of a good man who was dead—a thing painted by a young Swiss artist who died unknown in a Swiss town, leaving this dreary work to the friend and inspirer of his college days. The picture was powerful in the extreme, but Pfarrer Caflisch never shrank from it; the bare-faced anguish of the drawn mouth and eyelids almost pleased him. They represented the truth to him—and to him the Real was Truth. The terms on which he accepted the Christian religion and the manner in which he preached it may therefore be easily understood. It was scarcely to be wondered at if such a mind, living in a narrow and obscure Swiss village, should sometimes wander from the given paths of a clergyman's existence.

With scarcely any exception, the life led in the doctor's house was that of any other peasant household. Mary's money had never come into it. At Mary's own insistent desire the quiet old house with all its simple wooden fittings had been left precisely as she found it. Her money was entailed on her child as I have said, but the income went to her husband. He, however, would have put it to any other use than that of household luxuries; and so it lay in the bank at Chur, and there accumulated as the years

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passed by. Doctor Caflisch went on living with his old mother and his sister, Christina. They had one little maid, just as well born as themselves, who came from her own home in another village to live with them and to share in all their household work more as a friend than as a servant. Otherwise the old peasant-woman and her daughter did all those things which Mary's people at home were accustomed to leave to their helots.

Christina was a quiet peasant-girl, reserved and almost haughty to strangers, but possessing to a remarkable degree the dignity and intelligence of her race. She had a beautiful well-trained voice, and she sang with perfect harmony in the village choir of men and girls. Both she and her mother were good spinners. They grew their own flax in a little field down the valley, and some of the finest linen on Mary's big carved bed was not only woven by their fingers, but had been tended and grown and picked in their own fields. The doctor's old mother was a great knitter, too, and she was always knitting or weaving. She spoke very little, she rarely mentioned, and she practically never criticized, her neighbours.

Linda therefore grew up with absolutely no knowledge at all of ordinary human "gossip." When in later life she became aware of this chatter, it always seemed to her like a desecration of personality.

It would have been difficult to discover in what light exactly the old peasant-lady regarded the marriage of her son with an English girl, for she had spoken very few words on the subject and had not withheld her blessing. She was a wise and far-seeing old woman, and could not really have approved it; but it is probable that she disliked, not the actual union of two such good, pure-souled persons, as the situation which it inevitably involved when giving promise of a child. Frau Caflisch had loved the young English lady well enough in her own grim fashion. She would go once a year to the room where she died, and shake out the pretty frocks of the young wife, and stick a

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spray of rosemary amongst the dainty linen. When Mr. Crane arrived to stay from England, she would rise from her seat and show him his chair—a thing which she did for very few people. She could appreciate what was good and even noble in this man, and she dumbly acknowledged his right to a certain faint resentment in his sorrow. Mr. Crane returned this show of courtesy, and they formed a curious couple sitting there together. Mr. Crane had never forbidden his daughter's marriage, but he had disliked it; after her death he took a real, if a rather precise, interest in her child, urging the father, with what tact he might, to entrust the small creature entirely to his own care. Doctor Caflisch acknowledged the English rights in one sense—he agreed to let Linda visit England as soon as she could understand it, and should require, possibly, a wider education than her good Swiss school could give her; but for the time he kept his child at home.

And so it came about that Linda grew up as a peasant. It is a free but yet a well-ordered life—a life of open air and hard work, too; a life where class distinctions have no part, and breeding counts for more than birth. In it there was neither room nor reason for delicate frocks or expensive toys, still less for the distinction of nursery and of kitchen company. Linda had only to go into the village street to find companions as self-sufficient, and with as great a natural dignity as she herself possessed.

Summer is the golden season for the children of the Alps. They take their holidays in a lump—they have three months of perfect holiday in summer-time, and find a thousand homely labours ready to their hand in which they are taught to play their part. There is hay-making in the valleys, there is hay-making upon the higher Alps; and the tending of the flocks of cows and goats by little boys and girls, through long ecstatic days on lonely hillsides, leaves on the minds of grown-up men and women a memorable and strengthening heritage. The winter days

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are short and full of school work; and Linda went to school when she was six years old. She dawdled down the village street with her companions, and a pack for her copybooks made out of a marmot's skin was strapped to her small back. Linda liked school, not because she at all liked study, but because the atmosphere was social. She did not learn very easily, and in after life the very last thing she remembered of those days was what she had been forced to write in her copybooks. The masters all loved Linda, she was intelligent and obedient and very amusing; and they spoilt her in that grim and rather grudging fashion peculiar to the mountain man.

But added to natural environment come the advantages of natural living. Children in a place like Trins are never torn between home and boarding-school life, and the children of the rich are treated precisely as the children of the poor. In Linda's village all went to the single day-school; all learned from the same masters. Added to this, the education was sound and good, and the masters were themselves as much a part of the village community as the children whom they taught. Education itself was communal. It was a part of life—not a hateful division *from* life—and, in a sense, it was very much diluted with life. For the village school was only open for half the year—from October till Easter, that is to say. The other half was devoted, both by masters and pupils, to all the hard learning and work of actual living. From the clothes on their backs to the smallest detail of their daily food, everything was understood as a hard-earned result by the small Alpine child. Everything except coffee and sugar and salt could be made rather than bought—made by effort, it is certain, but with accompanying joys and even excitements. School taught about foreign countries—great seas, strange cities; and there were terrible sums just as there were in other schools; but there was more order, I think, than in many schools, more methodical attempt to teach, and far less

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trouble concerning such bewildering interruptions as games and runs. The Swiss child is "disciplined" from its cradle—it is swaddled an hour after birth! It is not told to be good so much as it is expected to be, from the very start, "in earnest with existence." After all, why should one not be in earnest with one's existence? Human existence is a grim fact enough, even in the brightest and most glittering of artificial settings.

* * * * *

At Christmas a big pine-tree was brought down from the forest and placed in the chancel of the church; it was lighted with a rather frugal display of candles, but Linda used to think that the tree had fallen from heaven. The smell of the warm wax candles almost intoxicated her; something primitive in the proceedings—for the tree is a pagan rite and not a Christian one—appealed beyond measure to a nature at that time a little starved æsthetically. The children gathered round the tree, the little girls in black alpaca aprons, their hair very smoothly brushed and tightly plaited; and they sang the solemn Christmas hymns, and were given little cards with gold-lace paper rims, and apples, and pieces of chocolate which melted soon in their hot fingers.

On New Year's Eve—Silvester Abend—if Linda could only manage to keep herself awake she knew that she would see most curious and unusual doings. Once, when she was only six years old, she was taken by her aunt to pay a round of visits to their friends quite late into the night. They ate sweet cakes and drank hot wine which flew to her head and first excited her, then sent her fast asleep through half the festival. When they got home it was nearly midnight, and the bells in the little old tower across the street were tolling slow and solemn. Christina seemed much excited, and for once she forgot her usual duties to Linda, who crawled up on to the top of the stove in the sitting-room, and soon fell fast asleep behind the cotton curtain and

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amongst the clothes which were put to dry there. When she woke again the bells had finished tolling; they were ringing madly now, clashing and clanging together, for a new year had come. In spite of all their noise and din, Linda could detect another sound—that of a ladder being set on the wall outside—and there were young men's muffled voices, and laughing and scuffling. The room within was dark, but the moon outside was shining full, and Linda could see that the table was spread with cakes and hot sweet wine, such as she had tasted in the other people's houses; and she saw the top of the ladder against the window outside with snow on the ends, and a young man's head behind it. Then her Aunt Christina came into the room with a candle; she opened the window, and three young men came up the ladder laughing and singing. Her friend the schoolmaster took the lead. They sang and clinked their glasses and said "Prosit." Christina was sitting by the schoolmaster; she looked very happy. The bells came clanging across the street, and small frost crystals like little stilettos shot into the room through the chinks of the window. Christina's mother was sitting by the stove, and for once she was not knitting. She nodded her head and looked quite happy, and when the young men had gone down the ladder she helped Christina to clear away the supper things; and Linda crawled down from her seat on the stove and crept away to her own wooden bed.

This scene she never forgot. It was one of the earliest and the most vivid of all her childhood's memories. It impressed her as old pagan rites impressed the small Greek boy.

Every year at Christmas the children of Trins have a sledging party, when the little girls of the village are pulled up and down the street on their tiny sledges by their boy friends.

On these occasions Linda invariably rode on the sledge of her friend Basil Castille, who was five years older than herself, but to whom she was much devoted.

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Basil was the son of the richest peasant in Trins. The peasants are roughly divided into two classes in most Swiss villages, the *Kleinbauer* and the *Grossbauer*. Basil's father was the head of the *Grossbauer* faction—indeed, he went by the name of the "Emperor" with his fellow-citizens. He was rather a crafty old peasant, with a very good eye to profit and some slight turn towards speculation. He read his paper regularly, and he had acquired in the neighbourhood a reputation for great worldly wisdom, as well as for considerable wealth. The wealth of the Emperor was all in kind—the bank claimed little of it, and at the very outside he may be said to have drawn an income of £150 a year, and this capital was mainly owing to his traffic in milk and honey during the summer tourist season, when *Sommerfrischler* or little bourgeois from the lowlands installed themselves in the village inn and elsewhere. Then the Emperor got out a light cart, and sent either his son or his Knecht round once a day with his superfluous milk—the bulk of it he kept for cheesemaking, which was a more generally profitable investment, through the year. This sporting but perfectly natural proceeding greatly astounded his neighbours, to whom it was novel and wholly unprecedented.

The Emperor had one son, Basil; he also had two little girls, and he worked them to the bone at a very early stage in their existence. He had thirty cows, four pigs, six goats, thirty-five sheep, and two horses, and his wife kept a quantity of hens and yellow pigeons. The Castilles had always been very good farmers; they had luck with their land, they had luck with their stock. Their cows calved regularly; their sheep gave heavy wool; their horses, too, were never lamed. Somehow the hawks seemed to fly away from their hen-coops, and never to touch the Castille chickens—but, then, the Emperor's scarecrow was a monument of art! It was even an extravagant scarecrow, for the Emperor had not quite worn out the hat it wore, so it really looked like a man. Their meadows were

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smooth and green in autumn when those of their neighbours were scarred by the ravages of field-mice. Their barns never lacked hay.

The Castilles loved their land, and there lay the secret of this land's prosperity. They had loved it through generations; the land was their temple, the animals were their idols.

"Take a Castille," was the prudent advice of elderly peasant ladies with a marriageable son or daughter. "They've good strong blood in their veins." This was certainly true, but in doubtful proposals the Castilles, too, had something to say in the matter of marriages, for they were nothing if not shrewd themselves.

The church, and the gravestones in the ground of the church; the windows in the Rathaus of Ilanz; and the doors of many of the finest houses of the Upper Rhine valley, were loaded with the Emperor's family arms; and the chronicles and the archives of Chur abounded with their countless achievements. It was, therefore, no wonder at all if Basil held his head a little high. But as a matter of sober fact he held it so, not because his great-grandfather had been an ambassador to the courts of Venice and of Spain, but rather because his father's cows gave the best milk, his fields the richest hay crop in all the surrounding valleys.

The Emperor's house stood quite alone on a broad plateau of meadow-land below the rest of the village. It was a large and comfortable house painted with white plaster, and with many barns and stables all around it. Summer and winter, even in the slush of spring when the snows were melting and everything appeared degraded and dilapidated, the Emperor's house seemed always warm and prosperous. There appeared to be a more abundant store of firewood stacked round its windows, bigger beams to support the roof, thicker walls and whiter whitewash, than those belonging to other houses of the village. There were taller bushes of elder growing to the porch by the

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door, and higher plants of golden celery leaned over the garden wall. There were also maiden-blush roses and red roses, too, and a plant of lilac in the garden. But the flowers were kept in check, vegetables being so much more profitable. Whereas the other inhabitants of Trins kept two rows of beehives, the Emperor had six; and his cabbages and lettuce seemed to assume a quite fabulous form of growth. A flock of yellow hens with tufts of feathers on their feet and heads grubbed amongst the dust-heaps of the Emperor's back premises, where fat seeds seemed for ever sown and fatter grubs and maggots; and quite a troop of yellow pigeons lived in the unused attic.

A wonderful square wall, like a thing in some old fairy tale, enclosed the whole of the Emperor's garden; it was massively built with blocks of shiny granite, and at its four corners there were four little turrets, roofed with shingle, and each of which served as a tiny gazebo. This beautiful wall had been built quite a hundred years ago and long before the Emperor's day, and he often went round it in scorn and disgust, remembering how wild an extravagance had been committed by his wealthy ancestor. All the same, the little turrets were useful to him; he stored his beans, his maize and hemp upon their sunny floors.

The builder of the wall was a certain Basil Castille who had served in foreign armies, and who, at the age of sixty, had returned to his native village of Trins with a considerable fortune and a large idea of his family magnificence. This Basil did much to better and beautify the solid old peasant house of his forefathers. He was one of three brothers, all of them distinguished in their way. The eldest had taken to diplomacy, the youngest had been left with the farm, which he managed exceptionally well; Basil was the middle one, and neither he nor his elder brother ever married. The farmer married early and had a large family, the eldest of whom became the father of the Emperor. He died early, and his young family grew

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up under the occasional supervision of the two uncles. During their travels these two old bachelors had not only had their own portraits painted by the best artists of their day, but they had managed to collect other portraits and trophies of their distinguished Castille relations in foreign places; and in the large and now but little used dining-hall of the Emperor's house, these portraits still were to be seen—the calm eyes of the proud old gentlemen and ladies, in their big ruffs and their furs and fine court clothes, looking down with some approval and some disdain on the homelier prosperity of the present generation.

Perhaps in no other country do the tastes and the habits of the peasant and the aristocrat find such a blending as in that of the Swiss Republic. The Emperor and his family in the nineteenth century were for the moment peasants—peasants outwardly and nothing more. To them these travelled and mercenary ancestors had been but freaks in a good old stock which had returned to its proper breeding-grounds. The Emperor expressed an occasional mild interest, but no sort of outward pride in their achievements or their portraits; he simply accepted them as a part of the furniture of the past; in the present performance they played no sort of part. They were not useful to him, and he was fond of things of use. The time of embassies and of foreign service was passed; it was done with; and the Basil Castille of the nineteenth century was, according to the decision of his stern father, to seek his profit purely in the produce of his land; and Basil's children, the Emperor fully hoped, would do the same.

As for Basil himself and his own inclinations? Basil was at heart a creature of the soil; not a serf, but a hero of the soil, shall we say. The love of the soil beat in his pulses as a baby, and now, as a growing boy too, it literally throbbed through his heart. Basil was without any shred of ambition for foreign travel or adventure; he was as pure a Tory in character as he was republican in politics. At the age of fourteen, if Basil made castles in the air at all

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about his worldly goods and achievements, they were simply castles built round himself as the future Emperor of Trins, with perhaps five horses instead of two, and fifty cows instead of thirty. Dimly, too, he may have added to this goodly heritage the Castille properties in Italy and in the Engadine, both of which were momentarily ruled over by old bachelors.

Basil's mother was a slender, dark-haired woman. At the age of forty-five she had still a heavy coronet of plaited hair round her head, black and smooth; it had always been her beauty, and the Emperor had confessed his pride in it upon her bridal day. Frau Castille spoke very little, and worked very hard. She was essentially a wife and a mother. Basil was not in the habit of idealizing anybody or anything, but he felt in his heart that his mother was a good, a beautiful, and able woman; and as such he loved and revered her. He loved his friend, the doctor's little daughter, he even respected her, for she was self-contained; but sometimes he dimly, or perhaps unconsciously to himself, wished that Linda's mother had been as his mother, and not a foreign woman.

Linda went to the Emperor's house as often as she could or dared to do. In the childhood of every one of us, even in that of the least impressionable, and Linda was very impressionable indeed, there exists some corner of the place we live in which excites and thrills our fancy, and which causes us a sort of incommunicable joy. Such a place, and such a corner, was the Emperor's home to Linda. Sometimes she went and played there all alone, sitting on the floor in the summer-house, and turning about the maize and the purple beans. If the Emperor appeared at any point she would hurry away and hide, and her wild heart would beat up fast and quick, for she feared the canny old man, and he was one of the only persons who never for a moment spoiled her. This fact, however, only added to the fascination of the summer-house, for we need

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a dragon to make our paradise complete. Linda came sometimes to meals with the Castille children, and sat at the great round table with a slate let into the middle, and ate her soup with a wooden spoon, dipping into the dish which served them all. The Emperor's little girls were very slow and solemn in their movements, and Linda never grew really fond of them. At the age of six or seven they already seemed burdened and oppressed by the responsibilities of life upon this planet; whilst the mere fact of being alive was to Linda herself, a delight and even an intoxication. All the same, she liked to be with the Castilles, even with the solemn little girls, for Linda had an ingrained love of good society and of good living, and the Castille family was nobly born.

Linda was not a snob—that is quite a different matter, for snobbery is vulgarity—she merely liked good-breeding and well-kept houses, and the repulsion she experienced for squalid houses and mean minds was almost a physical matter with her. As a child, unconscious of cause and of effect, she made no attempt to dissect this feeling; in after life it became, perhaps, her deadliest bane and trial.

Doctor Caflisch was wholly unconscious of these instincts in his small daughter; indeed, he was so entirely without such morbid susceptibility himself that he would cause his child hours of almost untold anguish by his quite natural actions. There were certain memories in Linda's childhood which made her shudder to the end of her life. There were scenes, smells, little homely details, which caused her literal anguish.

One day her father drove her in a hurry to a certain mean and sordid little house, the outside of which had long made her shiver, and which in her most horrible dreams she could never have imagined herself entering under the present circumstances. It was a bitterly cold winter morning, and the sun had no power to pierce through the frozen clouds. The walls of the house were of a dirty grey stucco; in parts the stucco was pealing off, and grey soiled icicles had formed on the stone beneath.

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The doctor went into the house, and took Linda with him. The passage was coated with ice which looked almost like growing funguses; some shavings and sawdust were strewn in the doorway. As they entered the passage, Linda's quick ear could detect a strange, abnormal rattling sound, which greatly harassed her. There was a heavy steam in the living-room where the stove, now almost red-hot, was not often lighted; and a woman of the sort for whom Linda felt the greatest natural repulsion was doing something by a table in the middle of the room. Her father went up to the table, and lifted the sheet with which it was covered, and whence the rattling noise was coming, and she saw that it was a man who was lying there. His face was blue and wet, and the eyes were staring. The woman came and uncovered him further, and showed her father the man's arms, which were covered with white plaster, for he had had some horrible accident. Linda saw that the bones in his side were moving up and down, and she heard her father murmur that the plaster would do no good there. Then she ran out of the room, and stood in the snow by the roadside; she was deadly faint, and she thought she was going to die. Her father presently came out to find her, and wrapped her up and put her in the sledge; he looked terribly troubled, and he did not notice how pale the child was. The next morning he went back to the same house, taking her with him. All the way Linda felt sick, but she dared not say so. Her father said as they stopped at the door: "That poor man whom we saw yesterday is dead, Linda. I want you to see how good it can be—even to die."

The house was very quiet now. It was cold still, but the floor was clean, the doorstep scrubbed, and the sun was shining in. The man was lying on a bed in pure white linen; his face was white and beautiful; and there was a smile upon his lips. Basil and his mother had come to see him and brought a tiny wreath of rosemary and myrtle, which they placed upon his breast, and just above his white clasped hands. They all drove home in the sun-

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shine together, talking normally and happily; and, after that day, Death to Linda was classed amongst the things which are not sordid and which heal; it was classed, in fact, amongst the clean and pleasant things of earth. This may but have been the effect of contrast, yet it was lasting—she never forgot it, and it stayed her through many hours of later anguish. Linda often saw dead people—dead children, dead women—for children in primitive societies, such as these Alpine villages, are spared no details of the human tragedy; but she never shuddered at death, she was never hurt and wounded by it in the manner in which she was hurt by a million sickly, squalid, or pretentious details of our misdirected human lives; still less had it power to wound her, as cruel talk or rudeness could and often did do.

* * * * *

Linda's early life was essentially a life with and for nature, a life in which man living so near to natural things and depending on them for his sustenance makes less of words and of human possession than we who live in cities or near to cities do. In Linda's own home there were only very few sights which really distressed her. The rank weeds, like nettles and coarse grasses, which flourish round the dust-heaps of man distressed her; the scars which tramps and tourists leave behind them on the roadside, these things hurt her sensibility. But all the intimate details of village life—these meant use and necessity to her—they had nothing to disturb her artistic serenity.

The scent of the meadows before the hay was cut was dear to her. She would plunge waist-high amongst the feathery pinks and ox-eye daisies just before the scythe. She loved the smell of the cool black earth under damp moss in the forests: it seemed like a sort of ether to her, she would put down her face and sniff it up till half intoxicated. But, best of all, she loved the higher pastures where, even in summer, the snows of winter lingered; where sulphur anemones and all the loveliest and the best

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of the flowers grew and flourished. And in winter she loved the falling of the snows; she knew quite well, and merely by the sound of it, what sort of snow was falling in the night—whether soft or hard, and whether it would lie long. She loved the snow which fell in powder; in small sharp flakes which crackled together and blew hither and thither, and gathered into mighty drifts for days in the arms of the North wind. She loved, and understood in babyhood, those million miracles of our natural world which the children of cities can never understand, even if they journey far in after life to seek them.

To sum it up, there was breadth in Linda's upbringing; breadth in the minds of the people about her; breadth in the nature and clean, clear air; breadth, above all, in the small child's heart and soul. She accepted things as they came by; they were not explained to her, or interfered with; they were merely put before her in the plain and rather large-lined letters which she could understand. She only asked for one thing, and that one thing was "More": more hours in which to enjoy the day; more hours to sleep at night in; more friends to love and to be loved by; more room, more space for pure and innocent enjoyment.

Linda wore stiff peasant frocks made of the wool which her grandmother spun and wove herself. She was always scrupulously neat and precise in her personal attire. She had hard little boots with iron points; her hair was tightly plaited in two plaits; and hats were little known to her except on feast days or on journeys.

When she was five years old she went to England. Of this visit she remembered extremely little—just a few of those strange, insignificant details which somehow or other are stamped on our brains in childhood.

She remembered wearing a hat and cotton gloves. She could dimly remember her grandfather's study, for there she realized a new repulsion, akin to that which she had felt for sordid scenes and people. It was a repulsion for ugly, expensive things which have no beauty in themselves—for dark, dreary, heavy magnificence. From that date a per-

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fect horror of large, leather, revolving chairs, and of Axminster carpets possessed her, but she never talked about it. Her grandfather gave her a very elegant perambulator for her doll which she did not like, for she never was fond of dolls; she could see him wheeling this perambulator before him along his well-rolled garden paths, and she had a sort of sense she would herself have to wheel it always, which was agony to her. Her grandfather was thin and tall and always dressed in black, and he had a habit of watching her sternly, yet tenderly, in a manner which made her very uncomfortable. She remembered an old uncle, a doctor. He was rather amusing and attractive: the butler said something about him and a rake, but she could not piece it together. He had come to see her: "to have a good look at the child," was the expression. She was taken down to the study by a nurse who always attended her in England. The nurse took off her frock, and Linda was made to walk across the terrible Axminster carpet, chasing between the shafts of sunlight which seemed to her full of dust and of insects, whilst her uncle and her grandfather talked together in low mysterious voices. They said she was an absolutely perfect child, but "of a nervous temperament."

She remembered her uncle Sebastian; he attracted her irresistibly—he seemed like a brother to her. He drew a picture of Polyphemus for her, and in spite of her nurse, he rolled her about on the lawns and tumbled her frocks. Then the nurse scolded her, and gave her a little shake, because her frock was tumbled. He told her the story of Pegasus. Linda wept long and bitterly over the horse whose wings were torn by its mortal labours and mortal degradations.

She remembered a dreadful church, horrible to her because of its combination of her two worst bugbears—squalor and pretension. It had walls of wood round the place where she sat, and when she poked the hassock a dreadful smell of a horrible "long-ago," mixing with that of her nurse's boots, came out and stifled her. She remembered long hot drives in a large carriage, sitting up stiff

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with her back to the horses; and how the coachman who laughed in the stable with her nurse sat up so straight like a poker on his box, and never smiled or spoke to anyone. She remembered her cousins, the three James children; of these Dudley was the vividest memory—an enchanting English boy who rode on a pony and seemed to her like a god.

On the whole, perhaps, she was happy in England, but she was very much happier when she came back home. She was emotional; she conceived violent attachments to persons and places in those days, and although she disliked ugly or pretentious furniture, she had an ingrained love for luxurious living, and the large houses of her English relations satisfied this, and filled her heart with a certain pride of possession. But she never forgot the loss, which these things somehow involved, of her homelier comfort and freedom when in the Alps.

She was imperious, and had no illusions whatever about what is really "breeding" and what is not. She could give an order to a butler, if she wanted anything, in a voice to surprise and even quell this British functionary, who had been perhaps inclined to laugh at the "little foreigner."

So when the next year her father told her that her grandfather was dead, she but barely grasped the news, or why they gave it to her. Mr. Crane died on an August day. Linda heard of his death one morning, but in the afternoon she hurried to the Alp where Basil was keeping his cows; and she at once forgot all about it.

She stayed on the Alp for many days; she went out early up the mountain-side behind the goats, and in the night she made herself a hole in the hay, where Basil and some other children also slept.

Those were golden days—the happiest of all her childhood. The charm of the calm nights as she slept in the fresh warm hay was a thing which lived with her until she died, strengthening her love of a life with Nature, and hardening her horror of all the small and fussy things in our human, or at least in our "respectable" domesticity.

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CHAPTER IV

SEBASTIAN

"Lo, gods, two worlds immense,
Of spirit and of sense,
Wed in this narrow bed."
FRANCIS THOMPSON: *Any Saint.*

"If anyone wishes to imagine a genius of culture, what would it be like? It handles as its tools falsehood, force, and thoughtless selfishness, so surely that it could only be called an evil, demoniacal being; but its aims, which are occasionally transparent, are great and good. It is a centaur, half-beast, half-man, and in addition has angel's wings upon its head. . . ."—NIETZSCHE.

Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,
Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.
GOETHE'S *Faust.*

SEBASTIAN was an only son, and at the death of Mr. Crane he inherited the property. In order to understand Linda's story better it will be necessary to give a rather detailed account of her English surroundings, and of her uncle Sebastian in particular.

To begin with the young man's Christian name, for it was certainly a strange one: he owed this to his mother. His mother was considered a rather eccentric young lady in her day. She was an heiress, and came of a family where eccentricity amounted at times to actual insanity. She was high-spirited, beautiful, and gifted; her temper was uncertain; domestic life oppressed her, for she had a strong Bohemian tendency which suited very ill with the daily round of society and small duties required by Mr. Crane's position in the town. The happiest weeks of her short married life were those she spent on hurried journeys with her husband in Italy. She was an excel-

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lent artist and sketched persistently. She returned to her home, and to a depth of ennui which her strong sense of the ridiculous alone saved her from developing into melancholia.

In the spring, before the birth of her third child, Mrs. Crane went for the last time with her husband to Italy. Passing through Milan, they spent an hour in the Brera Gallery, and there, amongst other wonderful paintings, the young woman's quick taste discovered Sodoma's St. Sebastian—a picture passionate and almost modern in its tendency. Mrs. Crane sat down in front of this picture, whilst her husband examined a Domenichino in the next room. Before they left the gallery she asked her husband to call her son, if she ever had one, Sebastian. She caught a cold and an attack of fever that same day in the Duomo. Three months after their return to England her child was born, when she was in a low state of health; and shortly after his birth she died.

The boy was called Sebastian. He was such a fragile, sickly baby that no one thought he would survive his mother long. His father, who had had one of those romantic devotions for his wife which men of his peculiar culture and refinement sometimes have for the woman to whom they unite their lives, transferred this love to his son. The small boy's childhood was outwardly a happy one, for he had a singularly sweet and lively spirit. His sisters, his aunts, and all their lady friends worshipped and adored him; but, unsuspected by them, and for many years unacknowledged even by himself, a strange warfare of the spirit raged between his heart and soul—a warfare which his natural generosity, combining with a spirit of mockery and pride, compelled him to conceal from others.

Sebastian grew up in surroundings as artificial as his small niece Linda's were natural. But the same pagan spirit was in them both.

Some six years after the marriage of Mary and Doctor Caflisch, Mr. Crane himself passed suddenly away. By

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the death of his father Sebastian lost a purely spiritual and moral influence, a thing which had forced his outward man to become what it was, but which had very little to do with the emotional and lyrical soul within. Sebastian had a very clear judgment; he saw very distinctly the debt which he owed to his father. He loved and deeply reverenced this courtly English gentleman; their devoted and affectionate relationship meant very much to him; but he regarded, as a sort of curse, the points in which they differed. However, to the day of his father's death he suppressed his inward antagonism. Mr. Crane, although realizing his son's physical weakness and inaptitude for bodily exertion, perhaps a little over-proud of his singular intellect, had early forced the boy's mind into literary and artistic channels, into a world of art and culture which feed the mind but estrange it from humanity and human needs. Sebastian was very human, he had something which throbbed and panted under the touch of human loves and pains, which almost burst at the sight of human beauty combining with human imperfections. Art could not satisfy him; yet to art he seemed inextricably tied.

Now the art admired by Sebastian's father had been all in the line of Corregio and Guido Reni. Impressionism was not in the time of Mr. Crane, and Ruskin was very remote and only half a prophet to him. Mr. Crane loved and knew the writings of the Greeks and early Romans. In modern literature he loved the purely "classic"; the masterpieces of the greatest writers, Shakespeare and Milton, were very familiar to him; Scott and Byron, too; but Heine and Shelley and Keats, though he did not blame them, failed to interest him. He worshipped the poet of his own period, Tennyson, and read him aloud by the hour to his children.

Sebastian, therefore, was brought up to love and to appreciate only one side of the Beautiful—namely, a rather artificial one. He was educated to it by the contents of a hundred big portfolios, by the casts and bronzes and copies

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carefully collected on Italian travels; by deep reading of the classics, and above all by his father's own strong personality. Up to the age of nineteen, when his sister Mary married, Sebastian silently accepted this education and its creeds. After that day a sort of inward revolution declared itself; a belief in something wider and more satisfying, to be found rather in the way of Beauty than that of Art—a thirst for beautiful humanity, and not painted or even sculptured carcasses of Beauty, as shown in books and picture galleries.

Sebastian became restless; he could not explain what he wanted, he simply felt it; and when, during the short spell of Mary's married life, he went to stay with her, and saw the young men of the village hauling their hay or sitting silent after their day's work—the sunset on their strong limbs, the love-light in their eyes—the craving for his ideal became a literal anguish which stifled him. He went on putting it by. He worked, he ground on in the old lines and the old beliefs. He acquired vast stores of knowledge, and at the back of his mind he felt that he and they were vanity. His university career, hampered by ill-health and the conflict of the soul, was still a brilliant one, and a joy to his father. He had gained a Baliol Scholarship at Harrow, he left Oxford the fellow of one of her greatest colleges. Yet these honours were as dust to Sebastian—that is to say, to the most vital part of the young man's soul.

At this period of his life Sebastian made friendships of the mind, friendships with young men of distinction and culture like himself, but not real friendships of the heart or the emotions. These friends, in later life, passed into the atmosphere of mosaic tables and Guido Reni photographs which he and his father had collected on their foreign travels. They influenced and purified his mind, but they had no connection with the more ardent side of his nature. He collected the photographs of these so-called friends and he stuck them in a large morocco album. In

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after years he liked to turn the pages of this book, and to remember that the owners of the calm, distinguished faces—very old for their years we should have thought them nowadays—had been about him as he passed through the valleys of a mortal anguish. But all these men had dropped behind him, or had gone before him, treading their own paths. Sebastian's path was not their path, neither was it ever known to any but a very few of them. Some became good lawyers, some clergymen, some politicians. The few exceptions, who had gone upon Sebastian's way, had failed and had disappeared. It was a way beset with thorns. As near as he could Sebastian reached his goal; but his breast was pierced with arrows like the breast of the saint from whom he took his name, and the light came early on his years.

Sebastian inherited all his father's property, with the exception of a good deal of money which Mr. Crane had bequeathed to the children of his two married daughters. Sebastian loved his old home as we only can and do love the places where we have suffered all our youthful pains and known our joys; where we have striven with ourselves and found ourselves. It was a big stone house, built in the early English-Italian style—dreary and a little pretentious outside, if filled with beautiful things within. The house stood in a big garden outside the city of R——; it was one of those things which inspire a sense of reverence rather than of admiration. The butlers and housekeepers of those days admired it very much indeed. It was, in fact, largely planned for their convenience, and would have been ill-fitted to the more stormy domestic times in which we ourselves are fated to live. Its great beauty—and to the eye even of a fastidious artist this was a true beauty—lay in a long terrace which commanded the garden on the south side, and which was decorated with stone flower-stands and approached from the house by a long flight of steps, such as one may see in many Lombard villas. There were beautiful lawns and tall tulip-trees in

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the garden; but the soot of the town settled over the grass and the leaves, and gave to the whole a certain funereal and dismal splendour which not even the freshest rains of March could ever wash away.

The house was much too large for a single man, and Sebastian, in spite of his strange temperament, was essentially a social being. Therefore it came about that, rather than live alone in this great house, Sebastian suggested to his sister, Mrs. James, that she and her husband and children should share it with him after his father's death. Sebastian, like many other highly educated people (though the world rarely credits the fact), had a good business head; and his very love for his old home made him wish to see it warm and comfortable. The offer was made and accepted on a perfectly businesslike basis.

Sebastian was not particularly attached to his brother-in-law, and the sprightly mannerisms of his sister often annoyed him. But he cared very much for their youngest daughter. Their friends, their social arrangements, their servants, their governesses and parties amused and distracted him.

The arrangement was certain to clash at some given point; but it held for a surprising number of years with Sebastian and the James family. Mr. James had a sort of precise, dried-up code which was carefully expounded and expressed by him at the start, and agreed to by Sebastian; and Sebastian himself only insisted on one or two conditions, the first of these being that he should reserve for himself his own old rooms, keep his own servant and horse, and go his own way. Secondly, that when his niece Linda came, as she some day would, to live with them, he should have a voice in her management and education.

And thus it came about that, at the age of twenty-three, Sebastian Crane settled back into his own home, without his father, but with his sister's family. He found a hundred outside interests and claims to engross an active brain—indeed, it was strange to see what an interest the fragile, spritelike

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creature took in many dreary matters of the town. In some ways he was like a woman, and the fine perceptive powers of his brain made him what in older days would have been termed "an agreeable gossip." He loved old ladies, he teased them yet caressed them; he was kind to all sorts of old personal servants and wearisome people. He never cared for young ladies; perhaps their follies were the only form of human folly that he could not forgive, still less forget. He dressed with an easy grace, and he ordered his part of the household with a punctiliousness that quite surprised his sister.

But in spite of all these things he was lonely, lonely as all abnormal lovers of the Ideal are lonely. He worked ardently and intensely. He was sure of only one thing in his studies—namely, that he was seeking knowledge; he had only one creed—namely, that he must follow good, and thus attain as near as possible to God. He travelled much, for his health was bad, and the English air soon choked him. When at home, he read and wrote in a sort of attic-room hung round with photographs of Michael Angelo and the young Antinous. He kept a horse and took long rides across the country, sometimes with a friend, often as not alone. He returned late on winter afternoons or in the dusk of summer evenings. He was a quick and almost tireless walker, in spite of his delicate physique. He loved to jump low gates, vaulting them with his hand on the top, and taking great runs over open country. He knew the planets and the constellations, but loved them mostly for their splendid names. In this way, too, he loved the flowers, and would often stay in hedgerows to gather spikes of yellow agrimony, merely for the flower's pleasing title, whilst he ignored the lovelier growths smothering the hedges up above him. After his walks and rides he had dinner with the family, smoked on the terrace in summer-time, and then went back to his study room and worked and read till midnight, often till dawn.

What was he working at, what was he reading?

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Classics—relics of the life, the joys, the loves, the passions, follies and creations of the past? Sometimes he took a picture down and saw young men and women wreathed with lotus-flowers, with love within their eyes—a glorious race! The poor boy put the picture by and covered his face with his hands and moaned. His sister asked him the next morning whether he had had a toothache in the night, for she had heard him groaning. He only looked at her, and then he smiled an odd, half cynical smile; her very commonplaceness sometimes soothed him. The one person Sebastian really loved in the house was his niece Joan. His nephew Dudley amused and interested him as much as any other young barbarian, but Joan was different. With Susan he was out of sympathy.

And so the years passed by, and the time had come again for the small "Swiss niece" to have some English education. Sebastian shrugged his shoulders, but he said that he wanted a little change, so he put some books into his big travelling box, and a great many flannel shirts and boots, and a string of Indian beads, and he went off to Switzerland in advance of the rest of his family to prepare the way for "that unfortunate child," as he was accustomed to call her.

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CHAPTER V

IN THE VILLAGE OF TRINS

"Mein Kind, wir waren Kinder."

HEINE.

IT was in the first week of July, and exactly eight years since the day when Sebastian and his father got out of the post-carriage in a snowstorm and went to the doctor's house, to find that the doctor's wife had died. Once again Sebastian got out of the diligence, but there was no sign of snow this time. The day was hot and cloudless. The afternoon shadows were lengthening, the valley seemed very calm and still, for most of its inhabitants were up with the cows and the hay on the higher pastures, and only some of the women, the young children, and the older men were left below in the villages. Where the post-carriages had passed a long cloud of dust lingered above the road. The passengers and the luggage, the horses and postillion were white with dust; but the valley was green, and the houses were smothered in the summer foliage of their fruit-trees. Sebastian jumped down from the coupé and up the steps of the inn. In outward appearance he had altered very slightly in the past eight years. He wore a loose grey coat, and his large straw hat, with the Magdalen lilies on it, looked somehow strangely out of place on the small head with its thick crop of hair. His face was white and smooth, the eyes heavy, the brow was deeply furrowed, but without lines. An extraordinary mixture of youth and of fatigue was the thing which struck one most about the young man, a mixture of much physical weakness clashing

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with a brave show of moral courage and some unwonted force of brain. Till he spoke one would have taken him for a mere boy. Sebastian went straight up to his cool little room to rest awhile. He was exhausted, for the day was hot and he had been up since dawn, so he closed his shutters, lay down on the sofa, and soon he fell asleep. At five o'clock his servant brought him tea; then he got up and went down the street.

Already the hush and the cool of evening was creeping into the valley. A delicious scent of new-mown hay came out through the open doors of every barn and filled the quiet air; the water trickled through the wooden pump in the square; some hens crooned in the gutter; and very far away one heard the rumble of the hidden Rhine. The scene was one of the profoundest peace. It touched some chord in the young man's heart, for he clasped his hands behind him and walked humming down the street. The doctor's house looked quite deserted when he reached it, but Sebastian went up the steps and through the open door.

Christina and her mother were sitting by a table in the hall and stoning cherries. They had a large pile of stones in front of them, and the fruit they put into a big stone jar which stood on a chair between them. If the street felt cool and peaceful, this long low hall where the sun never entered even on a summer's day seemed almost more like the vault of a cathedral. Christina had a white handkerchief over her head. She did not seem surprised to see Sebastian. She merely got up and gave him her hand, and offered him a chair by her mother. Sebastian had a profound admiration for the old peasant-woman, but he was pompous and pedantic enough at that age to be surprised rather than touched by the courteous manner and apparent indifference to his arrival shown to him by these two peasant-women. He had always been rather afraid of Christina. She could not come into his

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category of "young ladies." She was young and good-looking, but painfully out of his circle of thought and of friendship, and he felt a little nervous when he spoke to her; she was so calm and sustained, and she did all the dull and uneventful things which servants did for him at home with a peculiar grace and apparent indifference.

Almost mechanically, Sebastian sat down between the two women and began to pull the stones out of the cherries; but he did it badly, and the old woman patted him with her sticky fingers and advised him to leave off. Sebastian winced, and then felt ashamed of himself. He got up and he looked out of the door. Then he came back to the table.

"Is Linda out?" he asked.

"I think she is playing in the orchards," said Christina. "Shall I fetch her?—you will want to see her."

"Oh, please do not hurry," said Sebastian. "You will have heard that my sister and her husband are coming in a few days to fetch Linda," he continued.

The old woman sighed, but her daughter answered:

"We think it is a pity that Poppeli should leave her home now. The child is strong and happy. What can she gain by going to England?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing," said Sebastian. It was rather an effort for him to speak German, yet he was a good German scholar and he could read the language easily. When it came, however, to speaking, he usually chose his words with a sort of pedantry which confused his listeners.

Christina went on stoning her cherries. Peasant thought works slowly. Presently she spoke again.

"Poppeli is a good child," she said, "but she is not always like us, sometimes she is more like her mother. But that does not make it any better. She will have to suffer all the same if she goes to live in England."

"Yes, yes—Poppeli will have to suffer," repeated the old peasant-woman, and rattled the stones on the plate.

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Christina went on: "Poppeli has been free. She is wild and happy. The restraint of your English ways will hurt her."

There was a long pause. Sebastian was making an epigram, but he found it difficult to put it into German. "I understand you perfectly," he said at last. "My family is, unfortunately perhaps, entirely unlike your family. In many ways it is narrower and more commonplace. Poppeli will suffer when she comes to live with it. But her pain will only be a form of moral vaccination. An evil injected so early into healthy blood will merely leave a faint scar, the scar of a scratch, and in most healthy human beings this vaccination will have the desired effect. It may complicate life, but it will also mitigate its dangers."

Christina had stopped stoning her cherries. She fixed her clear and rather solemn eyes on the young Englishman, and a strange enigmatical smile crept over her lips. But the old woman asked him to repeat his words, and then she nodded her head.

"Yes, yes," she said, "you are not a fool, young man." And Sebastian bowed. He was flattered.

There was a noise in the street, and Linda, hot and breathless, came running up the steps and into the hall, and when she came a wave of heat and open air seemed to come with her. She was dazzled in the darkness and she did not notice Sebastian.

"Aunt Christina, Aunt Christina," she called in a shrill, piping voice which clashed with the silence around her, "there will be a rat at the root of the big cherry-tree—the fruit is sour, and scarce, and dry, and the Emperor says we may eat it, because it won't do for cooking; and Basil says that if it won't do for cooking, it won't do for eating neither."

The child stopped speaking from very breathlessness. It was evident that she had accepted the Emperor's advice

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rather than that of his son, for her face was stained with cherry juice. This, however, did not by any means alter the charm of her appearance, which was one of singular beauty. She had all the refined essence of childhood's beauty—a flush of health rather than of redness in her cheeks, a palpitating joy in her large brown eyes, an intoxication of vigour everywhere.

Sebastian got up from his chair and Linda saw him.

"Who's the man?" she asked eagerly, and staring fixedly at him.

"Don't you remember me?" said Sebastian.

"No," said Linda. "And yes, too. But——"

"But what?"

"I like thee——"

"Then kiss me," said Sebastian.

And Linda threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Sebastian pulled the string of Indian beads from his pocket and tied them round the little girl's neck.

"I'm your Uncle Sebastian," he said.

"Of course you are," said Linda, highly delighted with her present, and always impulsive in her statements.

Then Christina sent Linda to wash her face. When the child came back they talked a little about her coming journey, and later on Christina put away the cherries and cleared the table.

"You would like to come into the churchyard," she said very simply, and they went down the steps and across the street, Linda following behind them.

The sun had set. The wooden door of the churchyard stood open wide, and you could see the snowy ridges of the opposite mountains shining through their natural frame. There is a great peace about the graves of Trins. A black cross, or a tiny rough-hewn stone, stand as sole landmarks for the departed souls of its villagers, and tufted pinks and sword-grass run riot over the gentle mounds of earth where periwinkles form a living wreath.

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In a bit of open ground, looking right away across the valley, there was a solitary grave with a white stone cross upon it. Tall spikes of withered lilies, and a bush of maiden-blush roses, grew from its soil. Christina stopped beside the grave, and Linda knelt down mechanically, as though performing some accustomed duty, clasped her small brown hands together, and hurried through a prayer. Then she got up and rubbed the gravel from her knees. Her aunt took her hand:

"Read us what is written on the stone," she said.

"I cannot read," answered the child, "Aunt Christina, thou knowest very well I cannot read."

"I know that thou wilt not, Poppeli."

"Well," volunteered the child, "but I can tell you. It is written that Mary Crane Caflisch lies under the earth there; and that she will see God because her soul was clean. Also I know that she was my mother. But I do not worry about it, because I never saw her."

Christina made no remark, but she dropped Linda's hand and began to knit, and Linda ran off across the grass to meet a boy who was coming up the path from the fields below. The boy was Basil.

Basil was fourteen. He may be said to have attained the very zenith of the hobbledehoy period. But this fact seemed somehow to have doubled the charm of his pure personality, for a great dignity and self-respect covers even that most uncomfortable of ages in the boyhood of the mountain man. Though Basil's trousers were much too short for him, and had the appearance of being carved from a block of granite, they did not fail to impress one favourably towards their wearer—there was nothing unsuitable in their strict economy. The boy wore no coat. His grey waistcoat was closed by a small button across his grey shirt. He had a nickel watch-chain, and wore his watch in a large horn cover. His forehead was rather wrinkled and puckered; his hair, massive in its abundance, hung in great tufts across his eyebrows. His eyes were

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dark and keen, and he could see for a very long way with them. He moved slowly, and he spoke slowly, deliberately, and very rarely. Basil was, in fact, the result of long generations of sober, well-educated, unexcitable men and women. He was the result of a race of men who had always lived among high mountains and under narrow skies, the former of which facts simplifies and sobers the life of a man, whilst the latter prevents the vague desires and daydreams of the mind. The love of the impossible, the egotism of cities had not entered his large, contented soul; the artificiality of modern requirements would never tempt nor hybridize the steady straightness of his course in life.

Linda ran fast towards Basil, but the enthusiasm which marked her movements seemed to receive an accustomed check as she neared her friend.

"Basil," she said solemnly, "it is settled, and I am going to England. I am going to live with Uncle Sebastian, and I shall see Dudley and the very small horse."

"England is a very long way off," said Basil ponderously. And silence ensued; for Linda was thinking of the journey, and Basil was thinking—but perhaps it would be vain to say what Basil was thinking about.

"My Uncle Sebastian has come to see me," Linda hazarded presently. "He brought me this bead necklace."

Basil scarcely looked at the necklace, but he frowned: "It's an ugly thing," he said. "Where is your uncle?"

The young Englishman had gone into the church, and had sat himself down on a bench in front of some tablets, with armorial bearings, let into the wall. Sebastian was fond of heraldry; he drew out a notebook and copied the Castille coat and some of the dates and inscriptions. The children came in and stood beside him.

"You are drawing, Uncle Sebastian," said Linda. "Here's Basil come to see you." Sebastian offered his hand to the boy, but Basil did not seem to see it.

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"I am drawing your arms, Basil," he said. "You are a proud person to quarter Planta, Sprecher, and even Metternich."

"I don't understand you," said Basil.

Sebastian put down his notebook and, clasping his hands behind his back, he leaned against the wall and fixed his eyes on the peasant-boy:

"On one of these stones you quarter Caflisch," he said, and then his pupils dilated, for he was looking into the past and into the present. He was very pale and thin and rather haggard; something in his exquisite refinement touched the children, or excited their interest. Basil came forward and picked up the book and looked at it:

"The Caflisch arms are poor ones," he volunteered.

"Do you care for heraldry?" asked Sebastian, and Basil said: "No, it's no sort of use."

Then a strange and painful expression crept into the Englishman's eyes: "No use—none," he repeated to himself, and got up and pushed his hair off his forehead.

"What do you do with yourself all day?" he asked the boy.

"Many things," Basil answered.

"But tell me a few of them——"

"In summer-time I am mostly on the Alp with the cows. Some weeks I bring the milk down in the morning, like this morning."

"And in winter?"

"I go to school, and help a bit with the wood hauling."

"And do you read?"

"Sometimes."

"And do you think?"

"Not much."

"Thank you," said Sebastian. "You have told me a great many things I wanted to know."

Linda, who had fixed her eyes during this catechism on her uncle's face, now interrupted. "And what do *you* do, Uncle Sebastian?" she asked.

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"I dream bad dreams, little woman," he said, and they walked out into the street.

* * * * *

The place seemed deserted still, for the heart of the village life was throbbing higher on the mountain-side. Basil's work was done for the day, his companions had no work. They wandered on past the last houses of the village till they came to the foot of Canaschal, which small hill stands above the town of Trins.

"Let's go up and see if the tiger-lilies are in flower," said Sebastian, who never forgot the places where he had picked some rare or lovely plant.

They went through a thin grove of larches. The resin crept out of the twigs and ran down into the pale yellow cones. They soon left the wood and came out into a clear space on the hillside, with the ruins of a castle on it.

"As for the tiger-lilies," said Basil, who had not spoken since he left the church, "they have been over for a long while since."

And then there was a silence again, for the coming on of twilight, with its calm, is infectious even to young children, and Sebastian felt it profoundly. In the silence an odd rumble or murmur came up from the valley, but you could not see the Rhine. Sebastian heard it.

"Am Rhein, im schönen Strome
Da spiegelt sich in den Wellen
Mit seinem grossen Dome
Das grosse heilige Köln. . . ."

he repeated to himself, remembering the cities and the people through which the mighty river had before long to roll and swirl. His companions caught another sound, for a cowherd was yodelling on an Alp above them. His voice was so full and strong, the air so clear and still, that it was easy to catch the melody. Basil took it up and began to sing, at first very low to himself, then loud and strong, and Linda joined in as she strayed among the meadow flowers. Presently she called her uncle.

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"Come here, come here," she said, "and look at the butterflies. They have all gone to sleep here."

Sebastian joined the child in a patch of ox-eye daisies. Linda had spoken the truth. A whole army of Apollo butterflies had settled for the night on the daisy stalks; they flapped their big wings lazily, showing the crimson spots, as the little girl disturbed them.

Sebastian knelt down beside his niece and examined the sleepy butterflies. Then a strange and sudden light came into his tired eyes. He looked at the child, and then he looked out through the flowers and the grasses away to the woods in the valley, and beyond to the higher ranges of the mountains, where a pink glow fell upon the rocks and snow. He drew a long, deep breath.

"My God!" he murmured, "why not this—this, and only this—and the rest—nothing? Oh, Linda dear, what will they give you at home in exchange for this—— But —ni comme ceci, ni comme cela—ni même autrement."

"What's that you're saying?" asked Basil, who had joined them. "You speak bad German. I cannot understand you."

"That's exactly what makes you so distinguished," said Sebastian, and soon they all went down the hill and entered the village street again.

The thin chill breeze of night had arisen and blew over the mountains and down the valley, but when they came into the doctor's house they found it warm and quiet, and full of the sunlight of the vanished day. The windows of the sitting-room stood open wide, the air was full of a sweet aromatic scent which came from the currant-bushes down by the garden wall. The room was clean and bare, yet very homely; the ceiling and walls were panelled with cembra-wood. A solid table, with a slate let into its centre, stood in a corner by the window. Some stiff wooden chairs, with heart-shaped backs and long thin legs, stood against the wall, and a narrow bench or couch ran round two sides of the room.

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On that same seat, barely nine years earlier, Mary had sat on a summer's day and had given her soul to these same stiff surroundings and their owners.

A beautiful inlaid cupboard, with painted plates upon the dresser, stood by the door, and a pewter dolphin and a copper pail for the family to wash its hands at was let into one corner of the cupboard. There was little or no attempt at superfluous decoration in this purely peasant room, yet the whole was very decorative. Mary Crane had lived before the days of fashionable photographs. There was a portrait of her and her husband taken by a passing journeyman, a little grey plate in a gilded frame. It was the picture of a very young woman in a big crinoline with smooth hair parted on her forehead and large dark eyes. Her husband, the doctor, was standing beside her, and both, as it seemed, were carved out of ebony. This picture hung on the wall beneath a small bookcase. The books were mostly very old: a Bible and some few medical tracts. But there was a beautiful edition of the "Imitation of Christ," which Mary had given to her husband on their marriage-day; and some early poems of Heine and of Shelley, which Sebastian gave at the same time to Mary. These things were the only outward signs of the doctor's English bride.

Sebastian sat down on the wooden bench. Something in the simplicity of the room pleased and soothed his æsthetic taste, just as it had done his sister's before him. Indeed, all the scenes of village life through which he had been passing with such apparent negligence and ease stirred and attracted him forcibly. He seemed to dream a pleasant dream. Vague lines of sonnets, never to be written, rose in his brain and soothed him. Phantoms of a life which was far away from all the tedium of his study and his culture swam to his vision. He pushed back his hair and, resting his chin on his hand, he looked out and away through the open window.

There was a rattle of wheels in the street: "It's

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cousin Theodore," cried Linda in the doorway, and the clergyman of Trins came into the room. He shook back his mane of now half-grizzled hair and tossed his hat upon the table.

"So!" he cried, extending both hands to Sebastian, "so, my young friend! Have you come to pay us a visit? Sit down, sit down."

Sebastian had shaken himself from his dreams. He did not feel really in sympathy with this member of his brother-in-law's family, but liking the scholar in him, he was forced to accept the man. They began to talk about Linda and her plans. When Mary's name was mentioned the clergyman's manner changed to that of a child. Large tears rolled down his cheeks, he showed them to Sebastian:

"See," he said, "my flesh weeps for your sister, but her immortal part lives in my spirit."

"We have no equivalent for 'Geist' in English," said Sebastian, who disliked this theatrical attitude.

The Pfarrer, too, changed the subject.

"I like to see you here," he said, "you are so modern; but I know that you like our ways, and our homes. You are attracted by the simple life as your sister was before you—you do well."

"Yes," said Sebastian, fidgeting with his pencil-case, "it is the quality of simplicity which has made me admire the people of Greece and of Israel."

"*Admire*," repeated the clergyman, and laughed a little harshly. "Love, you mean—fall in love with them. Ah, here comes Christina."

Sebastian looked annoyed, but the clergyman put his great strong arm around his neck, which embarrassed him still further, and then he looked him full in his eyes:

"You are killing yourself by study," he said. "Listen to me. Live, love, drink, get full of life—we live but once. . . . Ah, and here's Basil! And here's our young friend, Heinrich von Herder."

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Heinrich von Herder was a penniless young Austrian count, a medical student, who had been spending that summer with his books in the village inn at Trins, and had made some friendship with the doctor and his family. He was a very odd and a very wild young man. He was the poorest member of a noble family, but he had early cast off all its shackles, determined to run some headlong, individual course in life. In many ways a strange likeness existed between him and Sebastian Crane. They were both infected with the disease of their age, and of all over-civilized ages. But whereas Count von Herder had early put conscience aside, and had declared in his sisters' schoolroom, where he made love to all their governesses in succession, that he was going to "go the whole hog" in life, Sebastian had sought an outlet to his nervous energies in the purely mental work of study, and was constantly wounding himself by the scourgings of his own conscience.

The two young men looked at each other. Perhaps they recognized something of themselves in one another. Then, involuntarily, they turned and looked at Basil, who, absolutely indifferent to both of them, was sitting on the ladder which led from the stove to the trap-door in the bedroom above, and carving something out of the half of a cherry-stone. Above him on the top of the ladder sat Linda. She had taken her favourite seat, and from that high perch the little girl half watched, half dreamed, the doings and the sayings of her elders in the room below. Nothing ever surprised her, and the strange mixture of men in her father's house that evening did not strike her as unusual. She drew up her knees and rested her chin upon them. Her thick plaits of hair and her large restless eyes were the only things which marked the human being from the bundle. Sometimes she put out her foot and kicked the head of the boy below her, but he did not turn or look at her.

Sebastian got up from the table and came across to the

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children. The clergyman and the Austrian student had entered on a discussion of "Hamlet"; both had been reading the play that summer, but neither knew much about Shakespeare. Their wild discourse clashed with Sebastian's mood as a thing from the region of art and artificiality which he so much longed to escape from. He tried to make Basil talk with him, but the boy was haughty or taciturn, and Sebastian was glad when at last the door opened again, and he saw the face of the doctor.

Doctor Caflisch came quietly up to Sebastian. He shook his hand without speaking. He was always touched by his wife's young brother and very sincerely attached to him. He insisted that Sebastian should be his guest that night. At the entrance of the doctor, Pfarrer Caflisch and Count von Herder lowered their voices a little. The doctor asked them to stay to supper, but they declined; they had settled, they said, to taste a certain vintage in the village inn that evening; and so they said good-bye, and Sebastian sat down with the doctor.

The peace of the place came back to him. He was very tired; he leant back on the wooden bench, and watched Christina lay the cloth and bring in supper. There was some dried meat and poached eggs, a big slice of cheese, and a dish of the doctor's honey. Sebastian went to the inn for his bag, and as he passed up the street he heard the sound of singing. In the dim summer twilight he saw a group of village girls sitting outside the Rathaus. Christina sat among them. The girls were singing in parts; their voices rose up and passed through the silence, measured, slow, and unimpassioned. Sebastian stopped in the shade of the street and listened. His restless, driven, modern soul seemed calmed by the mere simplicity of the songs they sang. He sank on a bench, and a sort of hopeless Sehnsucht came over him. As he sat there he saw von Herder come out of

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the inn and join the girls. The student seemed at home with them. He had a fine falsetto voice, and he joined their songs as though by instinct. Then Sebastian drew himself together again, got up and went to the inn, and, bidding his servant bring his bag, he returned to the doctor's house.

The only spare room in Mary's home was a sort of large attic where the weaving-loom was kept, and where old Frau Caflisch was accustomed to store her hemp, her disused spinning-wheels, and other wooden lumber. The room was panelled from ceiling to floor—it was, indeed, a box of cembra-wood filled with the weaving-loom, the corn-bins, and the wooden bed. There were no blankets on the bed, only the beautiful linen sheets with their fringe of old lace, and a red cotton feather-bed to keep the sleeper warm. The moon came up above the mountains. It was a large waning moon, and it cast a pure white light upon the marvellous fittings of the attic. Sebastian could not sleep. He got out a little volume of Shakespeare's sonnets and read them as he lay in the light of the moon. The summer night wore on. From where the young man lay he could see the valley bathed in the whitest light, and one or two pale planets in the quivering blues and greens of the sky.

Basil got up at dawn. He had slept eight hours of heavy, dreamless sleep. He rolled from his bed in the Emperor's house, ate some cheese, and washed his face; then he fetched his milk-can and his stick and started up the road towards the Alp. As he passed the doctor's house Sebastian looked out of the window. Sebastian was pale, his hair dishevelled. He gazed at the splendid boy before him, and the sight seemed to fill him with longing and amaze. He leant over the window and his white face shone in the dawn.

"Ah, Basil! Basil!" he called, "where are you going to?"

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"To the Alp," said Basil stolidly. He put down his milk-pail: "Go back to bed," he said. "It's much too early for you and your sort to be moving."

Then the humour of the situation conquered its pathos: "Yes," said Sebastian, "I will get back to bed. I am but a very poor creature. Adorable Basil, good-bye!"

So at dawn the creature of culture fell asleep, and the mountain boy went on up the Alp to meet the rising sun.

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CHAPTER VI

ON THE ALP

"Konig ist der Hirtenknabe
Grüner Hügel ist sein Thron;
Über seinem Haupt die Sonne
Ist die grosse goldne Kron.
* * * * *
"Und das klingt und singt so lieblich,
Und so lieblich rauschen drein
Wasserfall und Tannenbäume
Und der König schlummert ein."

PERHAPS the best and most happy point in the life of mountain children is their yearly visit to the Alp. The word Alp to most people conveys a vision of snow and rock and ice and lofty summits; but to the peasant the name has a very different meaning. "Alps" to them are the small oases of meadow-land which, in cultivated mountain valleys, you will always notice above the level of the forest, and even higher on the mountain-sides. When the winter snows have melted and the heat of summer is felt within the valleys, the cows and the goats, and even the pigs, come forth from the stuffy stables of the villages, where they have been penned in narrow stalls through many weary months of frost and snow, and, forming into a procession, they ascend through forest paths till they reach the little worlds of greenery and sweetest grasses which lie above the level of the forest, and glitter in the early morning sunlight, and cling to the last rays of the sun at eventide. With the cows go the Senns and Sennerins, and some of the small boys and girls of the village, and the big copper cauldron for boil-

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ing the milk, and the pans for the cream and the churns for the cheese. The men and the women of this happy procession open the doors of the small wooden huts, they shake up the straw on the beds, they clean out the stables, and in a very short time the Alp is alive with living sounds, and a wild untrammelled life of work and dreams begins, and lasts till the first snows of autumn fall. And when this happens, the procession forms once more, and the cows come down to the valleys again. For days and weeks the tolling of their bells disturbs the air, and the whole tenure of the village life is altered and re-made.

Oh, they are singularly pleasing and idyllic, those little green meadows up on the mountains. They are like small bright jewels set in an iron crown, the gentle women of a race of warriors, and I know no single thing more tender, more profoundly peaceful, than the peasant-huts which sleep untroubled through the many months of winter, and which awake and open their doors on a summer's day to the cows, the children, the young men and the women from the valley. Up there a life is led as near to Arcady as anything that this tired world may dare to dream of.

A visit to the Arora Alp above Trins was a great adventure to Linda. Her father, being a doctor, kept but very few animals, although he had quite a tidy property in land. He had only one cow and two goats. The cow went up with the Emperor's cows, and paid a trifle for its board and lodging. But sometimes Linda had gone to the Alp in the company of her peasant-friends, and had slept in the hay with Basil and his sisters. She never forgot those days—they were the most exquisite form of gaiety she ever knew. On the day that Sebastian visited Trins, Linda had already laid a plan with the Emperor's sister—a maiden lady to whom the child was much attached, and who, like Linda's father, kept one cow, which she sent to the Alp with her brother's cows

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in summer-time, and sometimes visited. Linda had arranged to go with this rather grim old spinster lady and to spend a night upon the Alp.

Soon after six o'clock Linda woke up. She dressed and went down to her father's study. She found him sitting at his work. Linda usually knew exactly what she wanted, and she was quite accustomed to get it:

"Father," she said, standing quite stiff in front of him, "I want to go up to the Alp to-day; I want to go to Arora. I want to sleep in the hay, and to come back to-morrow. Aunt Elizabeth is going to stay there, but I can come back with Basil when he brings the milk."

The doctor stopped writing, and pulled his little girl on to his knees and looked long and earnestly into her face:

"Go, my child," he said, "but make Basil cover you up in the hay. The nights are cold, remember. And come back to-morrow—don't forget that."

Linda slid down from his knees. She loved her father, but she was anxious to be off. She fetched her little bundle and drank her coffee, and soon after seven her old friend came by to fetch her, and they started off along the post-road for some little distance. They walked very slowly, for the day was hot. Presently they left the road, turned aside, and came out upon a small lake half hidden in meadows in the middle of a forest; here they sat down.

The sky was a deep blue—a blue so deep you could look into it and know a little of infinity, its colour seemed so endless. White clouds were passing across it; they looked as though they had been combed out of a heap of the finest lamb's-wool with a large and even comb.

The sun was on the mountains, but they seemed dark and shadowy against the radiant morning sky. Their rocks and trees, their bushes of turf and bilberries, melted together into a soft blue haze which seemed like a shadow in the seething air from which the dew had barely vanished. Rows of feathery larches stood on the lower hills about the margin of the lake; the green of their

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needles was fresh and tender still, but even these melted into the general haze of the mountain-side.

The meadows alone were full of light. The buttercups, the hemlock, and red campion flowers shone and glowed together like sheets of molten gold. There were more buttercups than any other flowers—so many that they almost dazzled one. The meadows were like the glory of unlasting Youth; the mountains were Age and Knowledge; but the sky was Eternity—and it was far away.

All along the shores of the lake there were boulders fallen from the hills above. The water rose between the stones, and formed into little pools where crowds of tadpoles wrestled for existence. Dwarf rushes and a cloud of buck-bean grew to the water's edge; and all along the clear, cold stream which left the lake and ran into the valley, pale forget-me-nots grew in the moss, and tufts of gentians so deep in colour that they seemed to throb and shimmer. It was an enchanting boggy place. Tufts of crimson rushes broke the surface of the sphagnum moss, showing where the sun-dew grew; and here and there, where the peat was cut, one saw a plant of pale andromeda. Linda picked it eagerly, tearing the fragile stems as children do, and shaking the pale petals down, which falling, looked like opals in the moss about her feet. Then she ran down to the water's edge. A dragonfly had split from its shell on the other bank, and now came flying across the lake, all a-glitter and a-quiver in the sunlight. It settled on the flowers in Linda's hand. Its eyes were large and green, its body shone like an emerald, and was so slender, so elastic, that the heavy head seemed quite to overpower it. The child trembled with delight to find the pretty thing so near her hand; but her companion called her, and they went upon their way.

They went up the path, and into the wood. The grass was full of big blue gentians in the outskirts of the forest, but as they plunged deeper among the trees they left all

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coloured things behind them, and found themselves in a green and silent shade. Here was a different world indeed—a world of moss: mountains and valleys, plains and hills, of soft, slow-growing, fragrant, tender moss.

Hundreds of years ago there had been a landslip in this place, and a large slice of the granite on the mountain above had slipped down to the valley, making a sort of second mountain, over which their path now led. And up over this mountain the forest had grown; and under the forest the moss. A pine-tree will take nearly ten centuries to grow to its full height in the Alps, and many of the trees in this forest were already full-grown upon the skeleton remains of their ancestors.

The Emperor's sister sat down to rest again, but Linda took no rest; she had but little weight to carry, and she ran on deeper into the heart of the forest. She loved the forest. She could not realize its wonders or its age, but a child's soul is near to nature, and something almost holy in the seclusion of this place impressed her deeply. She turned aside and walked on deeper and still deeper into the wood. Her small feet pressed the moss so lightly that it seemed she stepped on springs, and she wandered on over the boulders, plunging now between the high walls formed by the falling rocks, and now emerging from their depths to climb their moss-grown tops. At last she sank down into a hollow between two rocks, and sighed and drew in her breath—the place was so soft, so cushioned, and so cool. A big tree rose at her back, and there were trees all round her. Through a parting of the trees you could just see the sky. The mountains on the opposite side of the valley reared themselves against it, and the snow lay dazzling white upon their breasts. So white was the snow, and so profoundly blue the sky, that the nearer pine-trees looked quite black and hard against them. Long trails of Linnæa borealis crept over the rotten tree-trunks and up the sunny sides of boulders; and flowers of wood-sorrel stood in rows, like

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little girls dressed out in white to take their first communion. In a deep cleft between some boulders a wet moss grew, which seemed like crystals; it caught the icy drops of moisture in the hollow of its leaves, and shone like chrysoprase and beryl in the darkness of the cave. The whole light of the cave was green; a cool and earthy scent came from its depths, and fanned the forehead of the child as she stooped to peer within.

Even on this hot July day the sun barely penetrated the heart of the forest at midday, and it held all the dampness of the summer night within its breasts. Linda felt the cold caress even through her woollen gown, but she sat very still. Everything was still around her, intensely still. You could listen for hours and hear no sound beyond the roar of the river, which came in gasps from far away in the valley, and the singing of larks in its meadows. Otherwise there was not a sound of bird or insect moving. If a needle fell from the fir-trees, if a twig broke, the sound was smothered instantly by the softness of the moss. Circles of round-winged gnats whirled slowly through the sunbeams, but they neither sang nor stung.

Children tire of stillness, and Linda at last was glad when the old lady called her, and she hurried back to the path and her companion. They walked some distance more through the deep forest; then suddenly, and as though by magic, they emerged into all the blaze of unchecked sunlight on the Arora Alp.

The grass stood high inside the wooden palings. Pansies, red campions, and forget-me-nots shone brilliant in the sunlight. Hundreds of grasses and bright flowers seethed in the heat; and some birds flew out of the bilberry-bushes with shrill, sharp cries. They were mountain larks who had built among the stones, and dreaded lest this child who, wild with joy, ran singing down the pathway, should touch or harm their young. But Linda

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was not thinking of the birds. She had a much more engaging pursuit in her mind, and she hurried on through the meadows and past the huts, and over the hill, till she came to the lake. It was a very small lake indeed, clear, clean, and shallow, but it reflected an immensity of sky and the tops of mountains which rose at least two thousand feet above it, and Linda pulled off her stockings and picked her way over the grass, and then she stepped into the waters of the lake. The water was so icy that it struck a chill all through her. The grass on its bank had been hot, and the contrast and discomfort between it and this icy water delighted the child as such things do in youth. The sun poured over her head. The circles and waves, which she made as she splashed in the water, swept quickly over the surface of the lake and reflected themselves on the sand of its basin. The child could scarcely hold her skirts for joy. She danced back on to the grass and into the stream which ran down the valley, through the wood, to a string of smaller lakes on another plateau. Linda followed the course of the stream through the sunlight and the shade. The sharp stones cut her skin, and the smooth ones made her slip; when she tried the turf, the heath and needles pricked her, but these pains are all wild pleasures in our youth. Sometimes Linda trod on the great blue gentian flowers, they were cooler than the grass, and they rattled beneath her feet.

The cows were high upon the hillside still, for it was early in the afternoon, and the Hirt was singing ceaselessly. His long, monotonous yodel came down in gasps through the hot and quiet air. Basil was the Hirt, and Linda laughed to think that perhaps her boy-friend would not see her; she kept as near as she could to the trees and the boulders, as she continued her course barefooted down the stream. Sometimes she trod on sphagnum moss, warm cushions full of sun and comfort, which gave to her tread, like cushions of down, letting the water up between her footprints; and then she plunged back into

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the icy stream, and came at last to the shores of a little lake, which lay in a cup of green grass ground as smooth almost as an English lawn. There were islands with dwarf larch-trees round its shores, and lots of rotten tree-trunks in the water. Linda sat down on a knoll of grass, and let her feet hang motionless in the clear waters underneath.

Away, away, away, ever so far away, was the world and the people. Quite near, the sky, with a brown hawk circling round the rocks, and the alpenrose growing all up the hillside full of the scent of resin. Linda's cheeks were flushed with air and the freedom. Her hair curled in little tight rings above her temples, and stood up, ruffled, round the parting. She took out her hairpins, for her head was hot, and the heavy plaits rolled down her shoulders till their ends dipped into the water and floated out above her naked feet. Then she drew out her feet and dried them in the sun. So she sat for a long time very still, and then she fell asleep.

Basil was coming down the mountain-side behind his cows. He was singing still, but more cheerfully, and there was almost a swagger in his slouching walk. As he went he made a nosegay of the rhododendron-buds. He stopped to wash his face and hands at a small spring while his cattle drank. The water ran through his splendid dusty hair, making it more than ever crisp and mat-like, though he tried to smooth it. Then he hastened his cows a little, and pulled on his coat. And as he walked he watched the island by the lake and the figure of a very small girl who had fallen asleep in the shade of a rock. The boy did not smile, but he was happy; he stopped singing. When he came to a boulder at the end of the lake, he climbed to the top of it, he drew in his breath and he gave a great call. His voice rang full and clear, some might think almost harsh, across the mountains. The rocks, as though they loved such boyish freshness and such breathing life, caught up the echoing notes and held them long within their frozen bosoms.

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Linda woke with a start. She was rather angry to have been asleep, and she did not look at Basil just at first; but her face grew red, and her long plaits dipped again into the water.

"Oh, it's thee, is it?" she said at last, for she could not long keep quiet. Basil had come to the opposite side of the lake, and stood there, kicking the stones about:

"Yes, and that's thee. Thou stupid fool, didst think I hadn't seen thee? Didst think thy hair was thick enough to hide thee? Why, right away, and hours ago, I saw thee. I saw thee down at the Schwarzsee. I can see a weasel move from up above."

"I'm no weasel."

There was a pause.

"Here is something for thee," said the boy, and threw his bunch of alpenrose across the water. The stiff bunch rested on Linda's knee. But she got up. She was half asleep still, and the flowers fell into the lake.

"Poppeli," said the boy suddenly, "why did you throw my bunch away. I picked it for you with pains."

The child huffed: "It's all buds," she said.

"I know it's buds," answered the boy. "But the buds come out in water, and the fuller flowers die in a week."

"I don't want them weeks," said the child rather petulantly.

Basil said no more. He took his stick and he followed his cows, calling them together with notes and whistling sounds, and slowly bringing them towards the huts up on the Alp. As he went he stayed a while to gather the largest and most blown of the rhododendron flowers; he bound them into a careful bunch, as he had bound the buds. He put them on a stick and left them by his door, and then he went into the stables. The Senn had brought his stool and was milking the cows. You could hear the thin splash, splash of the milk upon the pail, and the low mooing of the other cows, and the stamping of their feet. The stables were stuffy, the animals a little hot and tired. When the

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milking was done Basil left them, and went out across the meadow path to the house. He took the key from under the cover of the pig's trough, where he hid it every morning; he went in through the low wooden door and fetched his cans from the cellar, and took them out to the pump to rinse them with fresh water. Then he washed his hands, drew on his coat, and sat down quietly outside the stable door.

His work was done; he stretched his feet apart, and left his big hands, hanging idly clasped, between his knees. He was a small boy to have so much of work and duty for a creed. But he asked no questions of his life, and in a quiet way he loved it.

The sun had set in the valley; the Alp, too, was in shade. There were patches of misty light upon the higher pastures and the crags. Already the dew was rising to sap the warm, delicious scent of sunlight in the flowers and the woods. The beams of the châlet at his back gave out the heat in pants. There was in everything that silence which is full of sound; for in the hush one heard larks singing their last evening psalm, the Senn hummed at his milking-stool, the cows murmured in their stalls.

Near where Basil sat a large patch of snow—the remains of a March avalanche—lingered in the meadow; and a thing like a saint's halo had grown round its retreating skirts—thousands of tiny crocus-flowers, purple and white, fringed soldanellas, anemones, and little pale-faced primulas, a phantom of the spring-world fallen on summer days.

Linda had come up from the lake, she had discovered the patch of snow, and was sliding on it with extreme delight. Basil smiled as he watched her. He had been angry about her reception of his alpenrose, but he knew a lot about Linda; he was not, anyhow, resentful by nature, and he was conscious of his greater years and strength.

Presently the child looked up and saw him watching her. She ran towards him and reached him out of breath.

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"I was sorry I did not take thy flowers," she said, "I wanted to get them afterwards, but they floated away in the water."

"Here are more," said Basil, and stretched out his arm for the second bunch. Some of the blossoms were fading already, others were bruised. Linda looked at them.

"Oh, I don't want *them*," she said decidedly, "they are dead."

"You chose such," said the boy.

"I don't want any very much," said the child.

Basil made no answer. He began to sing. The child climbed up beside him on the bench and watched him earnestly with her large brown eyes. She was very fond of Basil:

"I like *that*," she said when he stopped, and when he began again she joined in with a shrill piping voice.

"I'd like to sing and sing, and then to be always living on the Alp," she said when they paused again.

"But thou hast only a little voice, and that is very high," said the truthful boy, "and thou'lt live but little on the Alp—thou wilt go to England."

"Yes," said Linda, "but not yet, and then I'll like that, too, you see." She had been pulling on her shoes and stockings with her back turned to Basil, and she had not heard his comment on her voice, or she would certainly have resented it. She now turned and looked earnestly and profoundly into her companion's face; then in an oracular voice she said: "I'll come back, and I'll marry thee, and we'll live always—for ever—on the Alp." She paused, and her mind turned quickly to other things. "Dost read?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Basil, "I read."

"What sort of books?"

"It's nothing very interesting that the Pfarrer gave me this summer to read," said the boy critically. "It's not stories—just true things about people like us."

"Read," said Linda imperatively. But at that minute

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the Sennerin called them in to supper. They had each a large brown bowl of thin soup with crusts in it, and they were so hungry that they ate in absolute silence. When they had finished Basil got on to the straw bed and took down a book from the shelf, and they went back to their bench outside the door. The book was called "Waldheimath." In a slow, businesslike way he opened it at the first page, and spelt out slowly those wonderfully pathetic lines in which Rosegger sums up the lost joys of his childhood and the influence of a mountain life upon his soul's development:

"That is a wonderful life for the soul—the life lived under the shade of the fir-trees, in the dewy meadows of the valleys, and in the quiet Alps above the forest. What was my inward passion there for God high in His Heaven—for all that is secret, and for all that is inscrutable! And how I must have thirsted for adventure, since, as I might not fly forth into the greater world, I so could build for myself a little world within me. And thus it followed on—the real things became a game, and what had been a game became in its time—life. And to every single thing which happened, and to every human being that I knew, some fragment of my childish heart still clung. And when at length these years came by, in which the higher fires begin to glow, my restlessness grew greater still. So, too, it will happen to others. For a long while yet I did as other people do, and then at length I broke from out the circle. Shouting, I flew into the world, full of that exaltation which to-day has drawn me back again into the woods."

"I don't like it," said Linda, "but I didn't listen much—there's no story."

"No story," repeated the boy to himself after a very long pause, in which his brain was working. "I expect it's true enough, though. Look here, Poppeli," he said, "*you* will do what the man who made the book did—you will go away, and you will spoil."

Linda began to grow very drowsy as she sat with Basil by the table. He, too, was quiet. He had worked all day and all the week; to-morrow at dawn he would be working just as hard again. He liked to rest and to have Linda near him on the bench outside the door. The sky was

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green and yellow in the west, and the snow ridges stood out white against it. In the north a large round purple shadow crept across the dying light of day.

Then a miracle appeared in the green. A dropping star, and then another and another, till the whole sky seemed full.

"Look," said Basil, starting from his lethargy and shaking Linda by the arm, "look, for the stars are falling, Poppeli!"

The child had fallen asleep again. She stood up stiff and stupid.

"The stars aren't falling," she said. "It's something else. I think I'll go to sleep again. I'm tired."

"No," said Basil sternly, "best see the sky to-night. Thou'lt never see another such."

The Senn and the girls from other huts came running down the path.

"Look," they cried, "the stars are falling." And soon the sky was full of meteorites which shot through the pallid air and disappeared behind the margins of the mountains. Amongst these dying sparks the great stars and the planets one by one emerged, and kept their steadfast course immovable.

Linda was wide awake now. She danced for joy:

"Oh, if only the big ones don't fall, too," said the Sennerin. "I've seen them always all my life. Yet surely the dear God won't let them fall from out His sky?"

"Why do they fall?" asked Linda.

"When stars fall, men die," said the Hirt lugubriously. He was a silly old man, and fancied many fables.

"Die?" said Linda curiously.

"They die," repeated the Hirt.

"And the babies are born," said Basil, turning on his heel.

By ten o'clock the sky was calm again, and the stillness of a summer night had spread across the Alp. Not a sound

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was heard. Linda, Basil, and two other children were sleeping soundly in the hay, for the night was hot, and the living-house was low and airless. There was air in the barn, and a litter of new-mown hay. The small stream trickled down the meadow and gurgled as it passed the dock-leaves. Once or twice, in the dead calm and hush, an owl fluttered out of the pine-wood, and round the fields and back again, but no one heard it. A fox glided over the threshold of the châlet, trailing his brush in silence across the wooden steps. The cows turned in their sleep with a muffled lowing, and Basil rustled the hay in dreams.

The night wore on. Linda had often slept like this in the hay, for we do not grumble at our beds as children. Once she woke up. The chill of the Alpine night crept over her forehead and fanned her vagrant curls. Half dreaming, she looked round her. She saw large stars through the beams of the hay-loft—they shone like moons on the bosom of the sky. They seemed very near to her—very round and still. She crept to her knees and looked out into the world of Night. The valley was full of milky mists, which glimmered faintly under the stars; one single light was burning in a châlet. Linda saw these things as children see them. In themselves they were absolutely natural, but to the child all nature is a miracle, and every object covered by a halo which older eyes may seek in vain to see. She crept back to her hole in the hay, and burrowed deeper into her bed. All the heat of the summer sun which had called this hay-bed into being rose up in the night, and with warm delicious scents and quiet airs it lulled her into dreamless sleep once more.

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CHAPTER VII

SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE

"Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain does tear;
A skylark wounded in the wing,
A cherubim does cease to sing.

* * * * *

"He who mocks the infant's faith
Shall be mocked in age and death.
He who shall teach the child to doubt,
The rotting grain shall ne'er get out

* * * * *

"*He who respects the infant's faith*
Triumphs over hell and death."

WILLIAM BLAKE.

BASIL got up before the dawn and began to open the door of the barn. He did not rustle the hay about; he was calm and quiet in his movements. But before he passed out into the starlight he paused a minute to look at Linda, who was still sleeping, deeply buried in the hay. One small brown hand was round her chin, a cool and dimpled thing which seemed to hold some hidden force, even in her dreams. Almost unconsciously the boy bent down and touched it with his finger-tips, and he felt the sweet slow breath of the little girl upon his cheek. She did not move or sigh; she slept on quietly, and the boy went into the meadows and the dew, closing the door behind him.

Basil went into the starlight, but he saw that the dawn had already come and was creeping up through the darkness—just a faint tinge of white in the eastern blackness, a thing as slight as the pallor on a young girl's cheeks when first her lover kisses her. The boy put on his boots and

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lighted his lanthorn; then he went over the fields and into the cowshed. The Senn was up and moving about the milking pails. He was a middle-aged man, and he looked like a battered mummy, for the dawn does not become old faces, and it is only the bloom of youth which can endure its bruises. The Senn grunted when Basil came in, and the boy took one of the clean pails and went across to the stables.

Already in this short time the dawn had spread, and had caressed with rosy fingers some filmy haze which clung about the ridges of the western mountains. Basil went into the stables. The air inside was thick and heavy, and full of the breath of the cows. But the dawn outside was chill, and Basil snuffed the heated atmosphere with a peculiar sense of pleasure. He kicked the first cow, calling her by her name, Brunhilda, and the big beast threw up her haunches and arose from her knees; then Basil put down his lanthorn, and taking a stool, he began to milk her. When he had finished, he untied the string which hung from the ceiling and was bound about her tail, and he turned her into the open air. Then he went back to milk the other cows. Brunhilda stood for a minute as though benumbed by the freshness of the morning, then she kicked out clumsily, and went off down the narrow footpath to the lake. She stayed to rub her nose amongst the grass and nettles which were bowed with dew against the fence, and then she joined some cows who were coming from another stable farther up the Alp, and they went together to drink at the wooden trough. Some small boys, a flock of goats, and more cows joined the procession, and slowly they wound together up the mountain-side.

The dawn again had spread. The sky and the earth were flooded with cold light. Linda awoke from dreams and came out into the sunrise—a warm, delicious ball of hair, and hay, and homespun, tumbling, half-awakened, into the morning dews. She ran along the path in the fields, brushing the heavy dew from the meadow-flowers,

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and slipping on the soaking sods of the earth. The world was quite a different world from that of yesterday; the birds were no longer afraid of her, and the coloured flowers were dead asleep and barely visible.

"What are the white flowers?" she said to the Hirt as she passed him.

"There are more white flowers at dawn than at any other time," said the silly old man: "I have often remarked it." In one way he was right, for the flowers of the bladder campion and of the ox-eye daisy shine with a wonderful and almost phosphorescent clearness in the dawn.

Linda went into the châlet where Basil's aunt was cooking the breakfast. "Aunt Elizabeth," she cried, "they are all white flowers outside."

The old lady was not in a very good humour. "There is no time to waste on flowers," she said. She pulled down Linda's hair and began to comb it with a large coarse comb belonging to the house. She plaited it into two tight plaits, pinned them in a crown round the little girl's head, and, giving her a towel, told her to go to the lake and to wash her face. So Linda went down to the lake, and dipped her face and hands in the freezing water; she played a little with the crisp sand about its margin; then she came back to the meadows and entered the stables. She was cool and damp; her eyes were dancing with their usual joy in life, yet it was barely five o'clock.

Basil watched her as he milked his cows. He was young himself, and a little proud of the responsibilities of life.

"So it's you!" he said.

"Yes," answered the child. "It's me." This was their usual form of greeting—a sort of opening challenge.

Linda went on: "I woke up in the night and you didn't. I saw you asleep. I got up and I looked at the sky; and the stars were as big as the moon." She stood in the doorway, kicking the step with the iron point of her boot. She would never have confessed it, but the smell of the stables choked her.

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"Have some milk," said Basil.

Then the child went to him, and put her lips to the wooden bowl from which he blew aside the froth. The milk was warm and very sweet, and Basil gave her a crust of bread—"to help it down," he said. Basil himself did not drink milk—indeed, he rather despised it, apart from its purely mercantile properties. He milked the last cow, and stood in the doorway to watch her join her comrades on the path. The boy looked hot and dusty, his thick hair fell in tufts across his heavy brows, his hands were cold and clammy with the milking, and he went to the lake to wash his face. When he came back he, too, was clean and cool. His brown skin had a soft red flush, and he had stuck a bunch of flowers in his hat.

They all sat down to coffee in the living-room. The sun had touched the mountain-tops and was slowly spreading down their sides to fill the valleys; the larches on the Alp shone like a shimmer of spun glass. The first rays fell upon the campion-flowers in the meadow; already they looked less white.

"Come," said Basil, "it's time to be going." He strapped the heavy pail of milk across his back, took his stick, and went along the path which led to the valley, Linda running beside him.

Linda did not look back to the Alp. She felt so sure that she would come again, for children have unbounded faith in the continuance of joy—a faith so large they rarely stop to think about it. The valley was still in shadow, but the sun was full on the meadow where they walked, and the flowers were shaking off the dew and filling the air with the scent of all their pent-up honey-bags.

They passed through the fields and into the pine-woods where the gentians grew, and then they came into the valley and joined the post-road.

By nine o'clock they were back in the village street.

As the children passed the door of the inn a party of

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English people came out and followed them talking. They were Linda's relations, but she did not recognize them. Mrs. James was there, and her husband, and her eldest daughter and son. Mrs. James was congratulating herself upon being up so early in the morning. "But, of course," she added brightly, "it is so easy to be called early abroad; the breakfast is so small, the servants have so little to prepare."

"Yes," said her husband, "a cup of café noir, a roll, some honey."

"I don't like abroad," said the boy. "Such rotten beds as they give one. What weird children, too," he added—"just look at them."

Susan looked. "They are only poor people's children," she said, by way of explanation.

Susan had pale straw-coloured hair plaited low on her neck. She wore a skirt and a coat, and a small sailor hat cocked over her sunless eyes. Hers was a common type, one which is usually clean and dull and rather faultless, but closed to impressions, uninterested and uninteresting.

As the party walked over the cobble-stones of the village street the dust seemed to fly away from them, for they themselves were so very clean and polished.

But the peasant-children went their way covered with little bits of hay, and the pollen of the flowers powdered their hair and deepened the tan on their sunburned cheeks.

Christina looked up from her sewing as Linda entered the room.

"Ah, Poppeli, I am glad you have come back," she said, "we were afraid you might forget and stay up on the Alp."

Linda had climbed to her seat on the ladder. "What are the clothes?" she inquired, and pointed to a pile of linen which lay on the floor beside an open trunk.

"They are your clothes, Poppeli. Have you forgotten that you are going to England?"

There was a pause. Then Linda got down from the

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ladder and stood in the middle of the floor. "I have not forgotten," she said in an impressive voice, "but I have decided that I will not go to England. Basil says that it's a bad place to go to, and so I will stay in Trins. I will stay with thee, little aunt," she added more mildly, but not less firmly.

Some shadows crossed the sunlight by the window, and some low English voices sounded at the door.

"Who are the people?" asked Linda.

"Your people," answered Christina, and she got up and went to open the door.

Then a strange dumb sorrow crept into the heart of the child, for even babies have wide and terrible perceptions, and one had dawned on her. She went back to her ladder; she climbed to the topmost rung, and there she perched herself, all stiff and quiet, like a little owl at bay.

Her English relations came into the room and looked at her very kindly.

"Poppeli," said her Aunt Christina, "Poppeli, dear, come down. Your aunt is here, and your cousins and your uncle. Won't you speak to them?"

But Linda said nothing. Her eyes were open wide—she had settled not to cry.

"Poor little girl!" said Mrs. James. "We must have frightened her. We are dressed, you see, so very differently from her people," she added gently, turning to her husband.

Mr. James was tall and handsome. He had a dark skin and dark, smooth hair. It was very well brushed, and it gave him that air of superior cleanliness and distinction peculiar to Englishmen of a certain breeding.

"Yes, my dear," he said in a quiet voice, "I understand. In the meantime, as Linda is coming to live with us, she had better begin to obey us," and he approached the ladder in order to lift the child down. He took her in his arms, not at all unkindly, and he put her on the floor beside his wife. Linda had allowed herself to be lifted in that stiff,

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imperturbable way which children sometimes do affect. She now uncurled herself mechanically, and mechanically she returned to her ladder. At that minute Basil came into the room. Instinctively he realized the situation, and he went up the ladder.

"Linda," he said severely, and Linda looked up. The familiar voice seemed to melt her, and she began to sob.

"Don't," suggested the hobbledehoy, "it's no use to cry. When you are a woman, it will not matter a bit. People like this don't signify—they come and they go." He spoke in the broadest dialect, and it was not possible for Linda's relations to understand him. But Linda understood him.

"I'll *not* go away with them," she burst out passionately, "I think I hate them. They are so clean, and they stare . . . and, oh! I don't want them, and I can't go with them. I hate them," she repeated, "they are all of them ugly." Her uncle caught the last words, which Linda, from pure wilfulness, had spoken in English, and he understood them.

"Hate is rather a strong word," he said severely, and Linda was frightened by him, and for the time subdued.

An hour later she took her aunt's hand and led her round the house and through the village. As she passed her peasant friends they stared at her; some of them smiled.

It is sad that even little children should be oppressed by "position." Child as Linda was, she realized the incongruous, and it hurt her genial spirit. She went to her aunt's fine rooms in the inn, and she ate some lunch there. Her cousins said that her fingers were thumbs, but her knowledge of their language was limited, and she was too simple to realize their foolish idioms. She sat on a velvet chair, very stiff and hot, and oppressed by the July afternoon, the heat of which all her new relations deplored. Linda had never minded the heat of summer afternoons before, she had never thought of them in the village of Trins, and already the aspect of her life seemed changed.

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But youth is elastic. The ways of her English relations were novel, likewise their dresses, their meals, and their half-packed belongings; the lady's maid called her "little miss," the courier lifted her into a higher seat, and her uncle gave her chocolates and pulled at her long pigtails. There was all that atmosphere of ease and riches which surrounds the possessors of a certain number of thousands a year, and Linda, as I have said before, was rather fond of ease and riches and magnificence of every kind.

"I expect I'll go home," she said at three o'clock, "I promised to go to coffee with Basil, and Father will be coming home soon after."

"Coffee!" said her aunt in astonishment, "I should have thought milk would be nicer for you, darling. Well, dear, Shrew can take you down the street."

The child looked up at the agreeable lady with a round-eyed wonder.

"Down the street?" she repeated.

"My dear little girl, you mustn't run about alone."

"Mustn't?" said Linda. "Oh, I—I do as I like—*all things which I like and which don't harm, I do*," and she proceeded with determination towards the door.

"Linda," said her aunt severely, "little girls have to learn to do not as they like, but what they are told to do by others."

A strange puzzled look crept into the eyes of the child. Her lips quivered and she dropped the handle of the door. "Oh," she said, "I didn't do no harm."

Then her cousin Dudley looked up from a book he had been reading. "Shrew's an ass," he said, "but I'll go with you. Such a fuss!" he exclaimed good-naturedly, pushing her before him into the passage.

Once in the street, Linda began to run, and she never stopped running till she got to Basil's home. The English boy naturally did not follow her. He whistled, and then he sauntered away in the heated air up the village street.

If Susan was a typical English girl of the uninteresting

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sort, Dudley was a typical English boy of the best and nicest sort. There was something honest, frank, and upright about him. He was just in his teens—a stripling with a fair clear skin which flushed and freckled easily. He had charming blue eyes, and that engaging, guileless expression which is really a mask, and defies the analysis of the schoolmaster. At school he carried most things before him—that is to say, most sports, for he had a very healthy objection to books, and fought shy of the bookworms in his house. Dudley looked glorious in the cricket-field, his thick yellow hair cropped tight to his bullet-like head; and he looked angelic in his evening clothes at a party at home. He was bored by his elder sister, and yet he never went further than to patronize her. As I have said before, he was one of the only things that Linda remembered from her last English visit; and on this trying day he was again the one and only golden spot to the imaginative child. Naturally enough Dudley James considered the whole Swiss alliance a "rum arrangement," but it was not in his nature to dissect events, or to bother his head about unnecessary enigmas.

He watched Linda run down the street; then he turned on his heel and went back to the inn and his people.

Linda stood breathless in the doorway of the Emperor's house:

"Basil! Basil!" she called, but no one answered. So she crossed the passage and entered the big room. Basil was there, lying on his back along the bench by the stove; one of his small sisters sat bolt upright between his legs, the other pretended his head was a cat and stroked his abundant hair. Linda said nothing; she was horribly out of spirits. She crept up on to his knees, but being heavier than the small child she displaced, she oppressed the overworked Basil.

"What do you want?" he asked, getting up.

"I don't know," she said drearily.

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"You had better know," answered the boy in an oracular tone of voice.

"I don't want to go," she said.

"I can't help thee stay," he answered.

Linda jumped to the floor in a sudden passion. "And if thou couldst, thou'dst not do it. And if thou didst, I'd go." She flashed her eyes upon him, standing stiff and furious upon the floor. Then she ran out of the room.

As soon as she was gone Basil got up from his bench by the stove, for he himself felt hot and discontented. A doubt and a trouble had clouded his eyes, and he looked at the world with a feeling which was almost approaching to envy. He did not hurry himself, however, he was much too well accustomed to his game for that, but he went to the porch and walked down slowly into the garden. Something was moving under the currant-bushes; a long plait of hair had caught in the stems.

"I don't care, and I don't care," said Linda, pulling the plait with rage and defiance. Tears were in her eyes, but her lips were stained with currants. "I'll go, but I'll never come back. I'll have other berries when I get there—big red berries, soft ones. Thy berries are sour—I hate them!"

"But you eat them," said Basil heavily; and his father, the Emperor, who was working in the garden, smiled in a sinister manner, for he was a sly old man, and had long looked into the future of this little hybrid girl.

Late that evening the doctor came back from a visit he had had to pay in a neighbouring village. He called at the inn and spoke to his English relations. It was night when he reached his own home, and his little girl had gone to bed. The doctor's heart was heavy. In many ways he felt uncertain about the step he now was taking, but he remembered his dead wife's wishes, and that this English visit was only an experiment; and then he went up to Linda's room and, taking her out of her bed, he held her on

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his knees and spoke to her seriously. Linda hated a scene; she dreaded tears or sorrow, or pain of any description; and she saw that her father was in pain—she saw he had been weeping.

"I want you to try and listen to me," said the doctor. "I want you to remember what I tell you to-night. You are going a long way from me. When you are away you must be just as good as you can be, and just as kind, and just as happy. Listen to what your Uncle Sebastian says to you. He is a good man. But do not forget your home. My child, remember that your old home is better than any new home can ever be, and that the people in it love you best. Come back to your old home gladly. Your mother loved it too. It is the best."

Then the doctor, who was outwardly an unemotional and unromantic man, took his child to the open window and showed her the stars which shone in the summer sky.

"Look, Linda," he said gently, "the Universe is immense. It all belongs to God, and so do you. Remember that, and try to be happy and to be good. God bless you." He kissed her long and reverently. Then he went down to his study and buried his head in his hands; a little later his old mother brought her knitting and came and sat by her son in utter silence; and as she sat, the tears rolled slowly over her hard old face, for she knew that the doctor's pain was pain of the future, and that coming pains are worse to bear than present or than past ones.

Early next morning—that is to say, at eight o'clock—the James family began to get itself into motion. English families of this type in those now distant days were not rapid in their movements. They carried abroad with them many things they did not want, and of which they never ceased to lament that they had not brought even more with them. Even their courier, who one would imagine would have been likely to assist them in the one thing he was paid to perform, failed at the outset; for the courier was

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"foreign," and the Englishman despises foreigners. The bags, the boxes, the bills, the arrival of letters and the papers—those thousand and one things which have nothing to do with what the traveller had professedly come to see, made his travels a disillusion rather than a pleasure to him.

Linda, whose modest trunk had long been packed and who was accustomed to far earlier hours, stood in the street with her father and her aunt, and looked upon all these preparations with a feeling which almost amounted to awe, for she herself was so small, so tight, and so composed a part of the huge stage scenery of the mountains, rather than of the puppets who were playing in the theatre of Trins that July morning. A magnificent picture-book, some chocolates, and a beautiful new cloak had done much to dissipate her horror of the coming change in her surroundings. Childlike, she was preparing to be happy with her novel life and people; and so, when the time came to leave, she clambered into her seat in the big post-carriage with fewer tears and regrets than might have been expected or wished from her. She was determined not to cry if she could possibly avoid so doing.

Basil had been picking cherries in his father's orchard over the way. He wrapped some of the fruit in a dockleaf and brought them to Linda. She threw up her head, bit her lip, and looked her boy-friend full in the face. Her father and Christina made way for Basil; there was something dignified and impressive about the peasant-boy. He paid not the slightest attention to—it is doubtful whether he even noticed—the rest of the party. These English people were infinitely insignificant to the son of the Emperor.

"Does he ever brush his hair?" said Susan, moving aside impatiently.

"I don't think he can very often, dear," answered her mother more kindly.

Basil did not hear them: "Good-bye, Poppeli," he said. "Come back soon," and he dropped her hand and turned away with that look of puzzled melancholy which may

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almost be taken for divination on the brow of growing children.

Dudley in the meantime had climbed to the box of the carriage. He was bored by the fuss of his family—by a fuss of preparations which some twenty years hence he would himself be the first to inaugurate. Dudley wore a Norfolk jacket, a straw hat, and long grey flannel trousers. He had a strong silver watch and chain and several knives in his pocket; also a spare cartridge or two, for those made him feel especially comfortable. He was very well disciplined by his home-life; but, as I have said, he was bored, and so he took the postilion's whip and began to flick the horses; but seeing that they were Swiss horses, stolid and sleek and unemotional, he tried flicking something else—the weeds in the gutter, the wall of the nearest house—and, as ill-luck would have it, the lash found its way to Basil's cheek. The Swiss boy turned.

"A curse on thee!" he said roughly, and making a sudden move towards the box of the carriage. But the natural slowness of action, perhaps the remembrance of the wide contempt in which he held these English people, checked him. He merely turned to Linda.

"Take care of that boy, Poppeli," he said, "it's likely that he may some day harm thee."

Then Basil returned to the cherry-tree, and the big carriage seemed to heave itself up, to sway a little to one side, and to start at last on the road to Reichenau. As it moved off, Count von Herder came down the steps of the inn with a knapsack on his back; he was humming a song. The young man's clothes were in rags and he looked a little dissipated, but he knew very well how to travel, and he went from place to place on foot. He said good-bye to his friend the doctor, and something kind about Linda; and then he sauntered up the village street in the dust of the travelling carriage.

As the carriage rolled past the Emperor's orchard, a cluster of white heart cherries fell into Linda's lap from a

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tree where Basil was sitting, and after them followed an unripe pear which just grazed the cheek of the boy on the box.

"Shameless boy!" yelled Linda, jumping from her cushion and trampling on her uncle's feet triumphantly.

Dudley caught the pear and passed it on to Linda. "I suppose your friend there meant this for you," he said.

"It's likely!" exclaimed Linda, snorting with scorn. "No, Basil doesn't give me sour pears. He sent it at you because he doesn't like you, and because you knocked him with your whip."

A look of bewilderment rather than of anger came over Dudley's face, but he said nothing more, and the pear went into the side of the hedge.

Linda's uncle laid a firm hand on her shoulder.

"Sit down," he said slowly. The language of the child, the general uncontrolled, yet collected manner which she assumed distressed him. He took out his Baedeker and began to study "routes."

"You had better put on your gloves, and rest," said Linda's aunt, attempting to assume the reins of control. "Do not eat those cherries. They are not ripe."

Susan took away the dockleaf from the child's lap, and put it in a certain string-bag which she habitually carried for reasons best known to her Creator.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" said the little Swiss girl, and the carriage sent the dust up into her large inquiring eyes, which now were filled with tears.

The sun shone fiercely. There was no single cloud in all the sky, but Poppeli saw no light. Surely, surely, this was not the road to Reichenau? Yet she thought she knew it all by heart! All through the summer months she had driven up and down it with her father; sitting by him on his ragged little gig, she could count the convolvulus and spot the lizards in the hedgerow; and in winter she went with the schoolchildren up and down it with her sledge,

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the keen air whistling through her hair, the whole world, the entire sky, her own.

A pair of spun silk gloves, the presence of a Baedeker, an expensive coach, a courier and maid—what trifles these things are which change for us, in childhood, the aspect of the Universe!

At Reichenau they stayed to lunch. The garden represented fairyland to Linda. Her uncle said it was not at all "badly laid out," but the lawn was a "disgrace." Linda had thought the Reichenau lawn to be like the paths of heaven. She knew the landlady—the impassive Pallas Athene whom many tourists must have admired. Linda worshipped the splendid, queen-like woman, and shyly climbed up on to her lap when she grew tried of sitting with her new relations at the table.

"Get down," said Susan as she might have said to her brother's terrier. "How can you allow her to sit on the landlady's lap?" she asked her mother.

Pallas Athene was wiser than Susan. She gently kissed the puzzled child, and putting her away from her, she left the room.

Towards four in the afternoon the family drove into Chur. They had calculated with great nicety the hour of their tea. The cool shades of evening crept over the valley of the Rhine, and Tödi and the mountains of the Oberland shone like Olympus at a later hour.

"What a quaint little place it is!" said Linda's aunt. "So nice and simple. One does not want any history in it. The Swiss are so uneventful," and the little lady smiled at her wit, forgetting, or more probably never having heard, that very few cities, great or small, have had a longer or a more tempestuous history than this little old town of Chur, so peacefully snuggled nowadays beneath its hills and vineyards.

Linda's eyes were dilating at the sight of the shops, the

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bridges, and the people. For, after all, things are only big and interesting by comparison; and this was her father's and her own particular metropolis. They came down sometimes for the day, and for weeks afterwards the child would describe and be dazzled by all she had seen and done there.

Tea came in at five o'clock. Linda had found a seat on the balcony of the hotel, and had been sitting there a long time quite contentedly, rubbing her lips up and down the cool black railing as she watched the carriages, the post, the tourists, come and go below her in the street. When tea was over she returned to her seat; she was so dignified, so much her own mistress, that for the minute they did not attempt to interfere with her proceedings. She saw her uncle and her cousin go out of the inn and cross the road. Dudley looked to her better than the other tourists—like a beautiful god-like human being—and Linda wished they had taken her with them.

The days are very long in July, but even in long July days Linda was accustomed to see something of the night. Indeed, she had no particular bedtime; the seasons and her inclinations ruled her surplus hours. Great was her surprise, therefore, at six o'clock, to hear her aunt calling her into the room again to bid her "good-night," and to find herself consigned to the care of Mrs. Shrew, who took her hand to lead her from the room.

"Where are we going?" she asked in the doorway.

"To bed, miss," said the shrivelled Englishwoman.

"To bed?" repeated the child; then she ran back into the room. "It's the time I go walking with father," she said, standing straight by her aunt's chair. And then the tears came into her eyes and slowly, slowly they ran down her cheeks, and there was a pain in her throat more painful than any pain she had ever felt in all her life before. But her aunt only looked a little annoyed and astonished.

"Linda," she said, "when you are told to go to bed, you must go. When you are a big girl you may sit up later. You are tired after the journey, and to-morrow is Sunday.

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Go, dear." And she gave her a kiss and took up the piece of embroidery which was lying on the table beside her.

Through the whole of her future life Linda remembered that moment, that kiss, that work. There are minutes in all our lives which are like great glittering seas of revelations, and, strange as it is, these minutes are oftenest the minutes of disillusionment, and not of anguish, of passion, or of joy. Linda was disillusioned—disillusioned in she knew not what, but we who look on at her, we, I think, can understand.

Mechanically the child put out her hand and touched her aunt's work. It was a bit of thick white satin. There were stiff salmon-coloured roses with golden thorns embroidered round the initials of Christ, and the initials were set in hard gold rays.

"It's very ugly," said Linda, "and the roses are dead roses."

Those were the very early "artistic" days, and we know better now, and do much better, too; but in spite of Linda the effort at beauty was in a right direction. Linda saw very well that her aunt's embroidery represented roses; but how should she see that to be what is falsely called "artistic" was to kill the glowing glories of Nature; and that to work a red rose with salmon and livid threads was thought to be an art more perfect than that of simply imitating the joyous colour of the flower?

The pretty lady gasped: "Linda," she said as severely as she could, "I told you you were to go to bed."

"What are the letters?" persisted the child, pointing to the initials; and a dim recollection of something on the pulpit at home rose up before her eyes. Her aunt gathered her work together:

"Shrew," she said, "I told you to take Miss Linda to bed. I will come in half an hour and hear her say her prayers."

Then a sense of the irrevocable came into Linda's soul

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and grew there. Silently she put her hand into Mrs. Shrew's, and they went together out of the room and up the stairs. As she walked, the tears rolled on unheeded down her cheeks, and she trod once or twice on her long stiff peasant's frock.

"Poor little girl!" said the waiter to the chambermaid, and the chambermaid stooped and gave her a kiss; but Mrs. Shrew went on.

They went into a room at the top of the house. The window was open wide, and the noise of the river which swirls just under the walls of the Hotel Steinbock came up and echoed against the ceiling. The room felt cool, for it was on the east side of the house. The parquet floor was freshly oiled, the iron bedsteads very smart; their linen and their coverlets were very much finer than any Linda could remember. The English maid, with the conservative customs peculiar to her nation, had drawn a table near the window. She had even arranged a mirror there to block the view.

"Take off your frock, my dear," she said, and whilst the child obeyed her, she went to the window and shut it; then she drew the muslin curtain tight across it. What, after all, did Mrs. Shrew care for the after-glow on Calanda? She had unpacked Linda's trunk, and taken out the comb and bristle brush. She now rubbed them with a clean towel, and told the child to sit down by the table. The English maid gave a little snort as she pulled out the coarse steel pins which bound the child's magnificent hair, and unknotted the rough braid which held the plaits together. Then she undid the plaits and began to brush and comb it. Linda said nothing all the time. She hated to have her hair brushed. At home they brushed it thoroughly once a week—but, then, between home and Mrs. Shrew there was a great gulf fixed!

As Mrs. Shrew brushed her face softened: "You've a fine head of hair, miss," she said. At that minute a knock came at the door, and the courier entered with a message.

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He gazed with unfeigned admiration at the little figure in the maid's room; and indeed it was a pretty picture, for the splendid brown hair fell down in a great mass from her head almost to the floor, and her little brown neck and arms showed round and smooth against her coarse white shift. The courier came forward.

"Will you give me a bit of your hair, miss?" he said to tease her. She was very tired; the man spoke a foreign English worse than her own, and she did not understand him; but she put up her face and let him kiss her, and at that instant her cousin Susan came into the room:

"Linda," she said, "how can you!" and her face was so dead, so sour, that the courier beat a hasty retreat, and Linda began to cry again unconsciously, hopelessly, for it is very hard for babies to learn a new code of morals.

"Mamma cannot come to hear you say your prayers," the young lady continued in her passionless voice, "You must say them to me."

Linda had only one prayer—the Lord's Prayer—and she said it in German. When her hair was plaited up, she ran to the bedside and knelt there.

"You are to say your prayers to me," said Susan.

"It's God I say it to," said Linda.

"I told you to say them to me," repeated her cousin.

Then the child got up. She was tired now, but she stopped to stretch her toes on the cool parquet floor, before she knelt down by Susan and hurried through the well-known words.

"Go on," said Susan.

"Where?" said the child.

"I told you to say your prayers."

"I did," said Linda.

"You must not tell lies; you said one prayer."

"It's enough. Father told me it was enough. He said that it was the only one Jesus told them to pray." And here the strain of the day bore down upon her, and Linda lifted her voice and howled—one of those long, low howls

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which lonely puppies howl when they have been taken from their mothers and locked the first night in some unknown, unloved barn. Susan was disconcerted; she was not accustomed to children, and she had not intended to be unkind. But Mrs. Shrew gathered the poor brown baby in her arms, sat down in the velvet chair, and cuddled her and tried to calm her.

"Oh, I want to get home, I want to get home," gasped the child. "I didn't mean no harm. It was father's prayer; he taught it me. I want home." And instead of growing smaller, the pain increased. She felt like dying—she hoped to die. Presently Mrs. Shrew disengaged herself. She drew a clean white nightgown over the little quivering body, and then she put it into one of the soft white beds, and in a cracked and ugly voice she sang the best lullaby she knew—one of those dreary servants' hall songs, called "Jo and his Dinah." And down below the window the familiar stream went swirling by, till the child's brain throbbed itself at last into an unquiet and unhomely sleep.

Once she woke up; that was when Shrew came up from her dinner. Mrs. Shrew had brought some raisins and a gingerbread from the table, and she put them by the child's side and smoothed her ruffled hair. The moonlight was pouring in across the floor, and the music of the river sounded soft through the closed window. Linda turned over to the other side, and soon her breath came soft and regular as she went into the land which it is given us to enter only fully in our childhood—the land of dreamless and untroubled sleep.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE LITTLE WHITE PILLAR

WHEN Linda woke up she was frightened to see the sun already shining full upon her bed. She was accustomed to rise soon after daylight at home, and even then she always found that her aunt was working in the kitchen, and her father often at his books or starting down the road to Reichenau. She began to pull on her stockings, and as she did so she watched with a sort of dumb triumph and revolt the sleeping figure of her companion. Mrs. Shrew was lying on her back; some strings of grizzled hair had strayed across her forehead; she looked like a thing which was done with—" finished up " somehow, and very stupid, too. The small child did not like her, but some instinct warned her not to wake her, and so she dressed in silence. She put on her frock, but her boots had gone to be cleaned, so she simply pulled off her stockings again; for she loved to walk out barefoot. Then she found that her hair was all unplaited, and at home it was always comparatively tidy in the morning when she chose to rise and go abroad, for people do not unplait their hair at night in good old peasant homes. Linda was too young to know how to plait it herself, but she took a hairpin or two and managed to roll it under her hat on the top of her head. Then she walked into the passage. As it happened, the place was almost deserted, for it was barely six o'clock. A porter was brushing the steps. He wondered at the strange little figure which passed him into the street with a shy Swiss greeting, but he made no attempt to stop her, for she seemed to belong to her surroundings. Linda was not sure what she

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should do, now that she found herself out of doors in a strange place, but it did not occur to her that there was any sort of harm in being there. The air was fresh and cool, the sunlight shone across the hills, and the river went rushing splendidly under the bridge by the roadside. Then Linda remembered the big church upon the hill which she had sometimes visited with her father. Turning round, she saw it right above her, and determined at once to go there. She started running, and as she ran her hair came down and her hat came off, so she slung it over her arm. She felt very happy and rather excited. She shook her head, and when she got out of breath she ran more slowly; but a vague idea that something would interrupt this wonderful escapade decided her to keep on running. She went through the market-place, and up the streets under the town wall, and under the turrets, and suddenly she found herself face to face with the stately pile of the Chur Cathedral. There was something forbidding and immense about it; she felt a little frightened as she looked, then she began to wonder how she would get inside and be able to see the painted screen with the saints upon it. The bell was ringing, a few people were passing in at the door, and some small boys were rubbing their hands up and down the faces of the Lombard lions which guard it.

At that minute a shadow came up behind her, and a kind voice in her ear said, laughing:

"So you've escaped, have you?"

When Linda looked round, she recognized the figure of Count von Herder, who had left Trins the same morning as herself. Linda was rather afraid of the wild young man, but she liked him, and he used often to come to see her father in the evening, for he was out of health. He drank a great deal of beer and sang wild songs. Christina often left the room when he came, and the village girls whispered as he passed them at their work; sometimes he kissed them if he could manage it. He used to play on the violin, and then even Christina came in to listen, because the music

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which he made was often sad or purely gay, like the voices of little children who cry and laugh. It was not wild or curious, like his talk.

"Yes, it's me," answered Linda.

"Hurry up, hurry up," said the student, taking her hand and running across the square, "you and I must be quick if we want to say our prayers before our English uncle catches us!" And he laughed, a little oddly the child thought; but she laughed, too, because she was glad to have found some person to talk to.

When they came into the cathedral the student pushed back his old straw hat, and then he winced, for the choir was singing all out of tune. Linda's eyes were beginning to blaze as they opened on the strange half-heathenish architecture around her. There were some frescoes of hell near where she stood, with a big devil swallowing a little child; the student passed this picture by, but he stopped to look at a small painting in a wooden panel a little further on, and there was a quiet, almost a humbled look in his blue eyes as they wandered around the dignified old building.

"Not bad, not bad," he murmured to himself. Then, "Hurry, hurry!" he said to Linda, who wanted to see a hundred things; and he dragged her on and down to the crypt, reading in his guide-book as he went. At the foot of the steps he stopped, and as he bent forward to examine a small white pillar, a delighted look came into his eyes. There was a garland round the top of this pillar with the heads of oxen at each corner.

"Here's the beginning of the farce," said the student, "and that picture up above, which you liked so much, my dear, that picture of hell, is the end, as far as we've got to in our limited book of religion."

His voice was hard. He pulled Linda's small warm hand almost roughly, and pressed it against the pillar in the crypt.

"Listen to me," he said, "and never forget what I tell you. This pillar is a pagan pillar—a pagan relic—do you

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hear me? The church is built over it, but the pillar is here, and the pagans are not so very far behind us—not so very far in front of us, either. Another picture will be painted, another pillar carved on the top of your picture of hell, but this is primitive and merely human." He took her hand, which now was cooled by contact with the stone, and he pressed it against her forehead. "Do not forget the word," he said, "it may help you. You and I may meet again some day, and then you will remember. *Pagan*, remember." Then he drew his eager fingers lovingly over the delicate traceries of the marble, he bent his head, and closed his eyes a second. Linda shivered, for the air of the crypt was damp and cold; and the student was a medical student, and ought to have known better than to keep her there, only he had his reasons. He now hurried her back into the church.

"Pray," he said, and he put her down on a wooden bench; she knelt accordingly, but she did not pray. She looked at all the beautiful things on the altar—at the saints in their gilded frames, at the strange white steps, and the beautiful vestments of the priests; and then her eyes rested on a great figure of the crucified Christ, white and terrible and full of wounds, and she remembered the little white pillar, and she wished she were out in some hot hayfield, playing with her village friends, and her feet all smothered in the meadow-flowers. Then she looked at the student; he had knelt down beside her, his eyes were open, and an expression of indefinable pain, of desire, of restless ennui, was shown there.

"Neither in this place nor yet at Jerusalem . . ." he murmured under his breath, as the priests went out of the choir and into the vestry. "Come, little heart, come," he said. And very gladly, with an intense relief, the child got up and followed him down the church and out through the gate.

As Count von Herder and the child passed up the street the people turned to stare at them. The young man was

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tall and slender, his hair was almost flaxen, and there was a half-nervous, half-daring look in his blue eyes—his eyes were quite peculiarly blue. The top of his face was handsome, the expression of the eyes reckless; but a keen observer would have told you that there was something wrong about the mouth, and the weakness showed itself distinctly even under the thick beard that he wore at the early age of twenty-two. Whatever his character, however, he knew how to take all animals, and a half-tamed creature like Linda, by storm. He whistled gaily as he strode up the street in the sunlight.

"Where are we going?" asked Linda.

"We are going to the one church that never changes," laughed the student, and he pushed open the half-closed gate of the churchyard. Then, as he entered, he took off his hat, which he had not done when he entered the cathedral.

"I like this," said Linda.

The student had thrown himself down full length on a patch of green grass by the graves:

"Of course," he said, "some day you will like it even better. Some day you will see that it is the thing you like best in all the world. It is the stopping of a weary question for at least a time—you will see that, and you will remember me."

"Why?" said the child, opening her eyes.

"Because you are *you*," answered the student, and he looked at her intently an instant as she stood beside him on the grass. "Who gave you those brown eyes?" he asked abruptly.

"God," she answered, without the smallest hesitation.

"Take care, take care what you do with your brown eyes," he said. "And now, look at me." He pushed back her splendid uncombed hair, and with something of infinite pain and tenderness he searched the details of her face. "What did I say the pillar was called?—the little white pillar down in the church?"

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"Pagan," she answered, for the word had impressed her.

"That's right," he said. "Did you ever hear about the nymphs—about the hamadryads and fauns and satyrs?"

"Yes," she said. "But tell me a story."

She sat down beside him on the grass. Just at her back was a narrow grave wholly choked up with clumps of gorgeous tiger-lilies in full bloom. On a little old grey stone was written this inscription—no text, no date, and nothing else to mark it: "Dieser Stein deckt ein edles Herz—einen Kopf voll Geist und Heiterkeit." There were flowers on all the graves—pinks and blush-roses, sword-grass and sweet williams—a brilliant sight of colours. And below the churchyard stood the stately pile of the cathedral; beyond it, again, the glittering tops of snow-mountains; and at its feet the sleepy town with the sunlight blazing hotly on its roofs.

"I can't tell stories," said von Herder, but he took from his pocket a little book—it was a copy of "Theocritus"—and he slowly translated the idyll of the Cyclops and the fair-haired Galatea.

"Poor Cyclops!" half sobbed the child when he finished, stuttering over the new word. She was very emotional and easily cried at stories. Then the student began to laugh. "There are other and fairer Galateas," he repeated; and from his voice it seemed that he knew a very great deal about them.

The cathedral clock struck nine.

"I expect your aunt has stirred in her bed," said the student, "and the maid, and the courier, and . . . oh! my shoes! what a caravan you form part of, my poor little woman!"

And then to Linda it seemed as though a dark cloud had crept over the sun. The tiger-lilies turned to the colour of lemons, the grass and all the flowers drooped.

"I'll not go back to the clean room," she said, "I'll stay here with thee. They won't mind if I'm with thee?"

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The half-remembered misery of the day before came into her mind and stayed there.

Once more the student opened his book.

"Would that my father had taught me the craft of a keeper of sheep,
For so in the shade of the elm-tree, or under the rocks on the steep,
Piping on reeds I had sat, and had lulled my sorrow to sleep,"

he read.

Then he took Linda up on his knees.

"The brown eyes are brave," he said. His own were full of tears.

He put her down and led her out of the churchyard, and down the road, through the old streets to the inn.

Linda's uncle was standing on the doorstep with an anxious look on his face. The look changed to one of annoyance when he saw the pair advancing and recognized his niece.

"Linda," he said very gravely, coming forward to meet her, "do you know that you have done a very naughty thing?"

And somehow Linda seemed then to know it well, although before she had not so much as considered the matter. Her uncle turned to the student, and rather stiffly and very curtly, in extremely poor French, he thanked him for the trouble he had taken in bringing back the child.

"No trouble, no trouble, I assure you," answered the Count in French as pure as the Englishman's was faulty. "Your niece and I have had a most excellent time together," and he turned to go.

But first he stooped to kiss the now disconsolate Linda. "Do you remember what I told you?" he asked in her ear, and the child said she did; but her mind was already muddled, and her heart confused by a dead, dumb sense of being in the wrong.

Linda was sorry to part from her interesting friend, but

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she was very young, and it never entered her head that they might not meet again.

As it turned out, they did meet some years later, when love and life had burnt deep and irrevocable brands upon the heart of the one, and when that of the other was just awakening. But for the time they parted somewhat sadly.

Later in the day Linda, with her hair brushed into glossy waves, came down the stairs with the well-groomed members of the "caravan." There was to be an English service in the small saloon of the Hotel Steinbock, and fashionable people on their way to the Engadine came stalking in to pray beside their velvet chairs. There was an ugly green-baize table at the end of the room, an improvised reading desk, and a small harmonium. It was all very middle-class and deadly in its ugliness. Unconsciously Linda looked at the tawdry curtains across the windows, and wondered whether God would ever get through them, or whether, if He did, He would understand the hurried nasal enunciations of the little clergyman or the prescribed prayers of the over-dressed ladies. The day was very hot. Linda had been up a long time, and presently she began to doze, and dozing, she remembered a little white pillar, and she saw a Cyclops sitting in a cave and saying to a nymph some words which the student had said in the cathedral: "Neither in this place nor yet at Jerusalem." She awoke with a start, to find the congregation rising from their chairs.

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CHAPTER IX

CONEYHURST

THREE days later the James family arrived in their own country house of Coneyhurst. They always spent three months of the year in this immense and beautiful home. They came to shoot birds there and to eat them; they came to perambulate garden-paths and vast tracts of greenhouse and of lawn, over which they themselves had really no control. The rest of the year they lived in Sebastian's house in the town of R——.

Coneyhurst was in South Wales, but it was a typical English home—a house such as Americans and colonists long for in their dreams. The property of Mr. James covered about three thousand acres. The country was barely populated; rare snug cottages lay smothered here and there, in silent sunny banks of grass and fern. The village of Coneyhurst was just a double row of small stone houses, the church was grey and singularly perfect in its outline, and big dreamy yew-trees smothered the scattered graves in the churchyard, for people appeared to die but rarely in the quiet life of Coneyhurst. Orchards of old and crooked apple-trees spread over the fields behind the house, and beyond there were copses and hills—quite low hills—covered with bracken and heather. As the James party drove through the village and entered the gates of the lodge, the sun was setting and a soft yellow haze crept over the hill in its wake. Linda was staring about her; she was much impressed by the big iron gates, by the lodge and the banks of laurel and of bay. Her uncle's elegant

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landau seemed hardly to move as the horses trotted rapidly over the fine-spread gravel of the park, and the little girl rocked up and down, and felt rather sick, on the well-hung springs. There was a sense of living in a wound-up clock, a sense of the throttling of Nature's pulses, as soon as the gates of the park were closed behind the carriage. The approach to the manor house was long, leading through fields and scattered oak-trees with a view of the house at the end. Coneyhurst was not precisely a beautiful building, neither was it old. It was a rather large, florid Georgian building, which had been much added to about fifty years ago. Its great stucco front with the Corinthian columns seemed only half to harmonize with all the green around it. It stood on a long and partly artificial terrace, above some equally artificial walks and lakes; but such are the soothing properties of the air in Southern Wales that every sense of novelty and every scar of building had very soon worn away, and the terraces and the ponds had joined themselves on to the rest of the quiet, gently modulated scenery. A little valley or glen ran away at the back, buried in orchards and deep oak-woods; and immediately behind this were the moors, up to one's knees in bracken. The flower-gardens were separated from the house by a large bowling-green, and both of these were greatly disfigured by the vineries—that useless and ugly expanse of glass, which the indomitable islander gives to himself because he cannot be contented with apples or pears, strawberries or plums, and you cannot grow any grapes without glass. The house was very large. Tall stacks of chimneys rose above its roof; great square windows, bare of creepers, looked over the park to the sea.

With a sort of muffled precision the carriage of Mr. James drew up before his splendid portico, and the party passed into the hall. The family felt itself at home—perhaps every member of it, in its own individual way, felt for one instant satisfied and freed from its otherwise prevailing sense of boredom. Mrs. James hurried to her drawing-

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room, her daughter to her bedroom, and Dudley made a cut to the stables. In the pleasure of the minute Linda was forgotten. This did not at all displease her, and, indeed, for the minute she was confused by the novelty of her surroundings, a little puffed up by her travels, tired by a night in town. She was indeed altogether out of her bearings, but dumbly happy. Feeling hot and in need of fresh air, she therefore left the hall and made for the garden. She stood on the front-door steps as little girls will often stand—stiffly, stolidly, with their clothes bunched up in front of them—and she looked with no small intelligence upon the scene around her.

Her uncle had entered the study with his agent. Linda could see him through the window tossing over a pile of circulars and correspondence. Superfluous young gentlemen in very white shirt-sleeves were carrying the luggage out of a cart and up through various side-doors. Some housemaids in stiff print frocks looked through an upper window, and there was a confused yelping of big dogs and a tramping of horses in the stable-yard. Nobody seemed to be thinking of Linda; nobody came to fetch her. Gradually an odd, lonely, weary sense crept into the small child's heart, and she sank down on the nearest and most convenient object she could find—a scraper. You might not have thought that anything so cheap and ordinary as a scraper would be found in such a splendid pageant, but all the same, it just happened to be there, and because it was homely Linda sat down on it.

She did not cry or shut her eyes, but she went on looking with a sort of dumb and savage wonder at the scene before her.

It was, as I have said, a beautiful summer evening, calm and still and green; and that strange pervasive sense of rest which haunts an English park at any time seemed on this serene July night to rise and muffle every sign of life and every bleating sheep and quivering leaf. The silence

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was profound, but there was nothing awful in it—nothing, if I may say it, of the sublime. Passion was as surely excluded from the park railings of Mr. James as the possible escape of his beautiful speckled deer. A few pale clouds clung to the pale blue sky; a little haze of gnats swooned round the leaves of the oak-trees. Red cows with short white horns stood in the square-cut fields, their udders full of milk, and sheep with heavy fleece gathered in groups by the hedgerow. Nothing seemed to be alive or moving save the rooks, and they cawed harshly as they passed across the valley to their roosting-places. On the moor above the house the heather, not yet in flower, made a dark and rather sombre outline over the horizon. Now and then a pheasant disturbed the stillness with a sort of chuckling, screaming call. The deer came creeping down the hill through the apple-trees in the orchard. Now and again they started aside with a little low wail and a click of their horns. In the big calm ponds a trout rose now and then. All the beasts and the birds, even the fish, in this fat English landscape seemed like its men—disciplined, well-fed, well domesticated—dull. And it was just the same with the trees and the garden-flowers. They were beautiful, well cared for, at home with man rather than with Nature—they had man's submission, but they were shorn of his passion. To one who had lived in and who had loved the "wilderness," they were full of a sort of accepted sadness rather than of repose. They stifled, they did not exalt one, or delight.

Little girls of eight years old cannot be expected to receive any very vivid impressions on the psychology of landscape, but all the same they are attracted or repelled by novelty; and as Linda looked at the scene around her, a thing which was painful, because incomprehensible, entered her baby mind—a revolt from this placid Nature, a loathing of its smooth and green content. Her eyes filled with tears, her lips quivered, her hands fell apart from her

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humped-up knees, and with a sort of wail she ran down the terrace and made for the woods as a fawn might do or a baby hamadryad.

But she was soon arrested.

"Hullo, Linda, where are you off to?" said a soothing voice in her ear, and turning round, the child met the gaze of her cousin Dudley. Then her sobs subsided into smiles, for the child had an almost passionate love for the handsome English boy.

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose I forgot."

The boy, who saw her tears, bent down and put her hat straight with a grim but signal kindness.

"There now," he said, "you stupid girl. Don't cry. If you're lonely—and being with Susan is enough to make a dog lonely—you had better make up to Joan. We will go and look for Joan."

Dudley was in a radiant humour. He was not a snob, but he literally gloried in his father's possessions. He was like a young cock on his own dung-hill. He hated "abroad," as he said very candidly, and this return to England and to his English home with all its charms, conveniences, and beauties, served as a sort of nectar to him. He suited himself, however, to Linda's paces not at all ungently, and suggested that Joan should "wait," and that he himself would do honour to Linda by showing her part of the garden and grounds.

It may perhaps be imagined that such an arrangement between two people of such different moods and education boded no good, as indeed it proved; but they started away on confident terms, Dudley with his hands thrust into the pockets of his Norfolk jacket and Linda stumping beside him. They passed along the terraces, over the smooth lawns and the bowling-green, till they came to the flower-garden. The walls were covered with fruit—with beautiful peaches and nectarines tied up in muslin bags.

"It's a good sort of place," said Dudley, "and Papa spends pots of money on it. Of course he might do more.

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The glass, I see, is getting into an awful state," and he scraped some mould from one of the houses.

Linda listened in silence. She understood English pretty thoroughly, but she did not understand this sort of English. She had an uncomfortable sense that her idol was boasting; but she loved him, and she had no wish to see him fall. She wished very much he would give her a flower, but she did not like to say so.

"There are fourteen men in the gardens, I think, not counting the head gardener," Dudley continued a little haughtily. "The weekly wage bill is simply *awful!* Now you people in Switzerland live in quite a different way. I suppose you can hardly understand."

"Yes," interrupted Linda, who certainly did not understand. "We don't have a servant. Aunt Christina cooks the meals, and cousin Marie only comes in sometimes to help clean the floors and the stables. Aunt Christina told me she did not think highly of rich English people; she said money often made people bad. She said it was a pity I should have to come and live with rich people."

"Aunt Christina knows uncommonly little of the world," said the young heir to riches very huffily; "she has stuffed you with idiotic ideas. And what a name she has got, too—Christina! Whoever heard of such a thing? But come along," and Dudley proceeded back to the terrace.

"Oh, but she never said you were rich," urged Linda, feeling that she had given some offence.

"Then she's an owl," growled the handsome boy.

"That's odd, cousin Dudley," said the child, entangling herself still further. "Aunt Christina used to say that she thought you were rather like a quite young owl."

"Confound the woman!" said Dudley with unfeigned disgust; for though he was usually kind and delightful, he had his vanities and his weaknesses. He was rather slow-witted, too, and he had failed to understand that this small child was anything beyond a poor Swiss cousin, a little foreigner whose mother had, perhaps unfortunately, been

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his own mother's sister. It was startling, therefore, to discover that this same little girl was far from being impressed by his position, and to be told by her, in the midst of his own broad lands, not only that he had the merit of being poor, but also that he resembled a very young owl.

Dudley assumed a different manner.

"Now, child," he said, "you had better run into the house and ask the maid to wash you."

"To wash me?" repeated Linda, and quick hot passion came into her eyes.

Linda was no ordinary child. Her free village life, her intercourse with simple souls on equal terms, mixing with the refined qualities of her English blood, had combined to produce an inharmonious but a striking and rare hybrid. If an artist had seen her at that minute he would have said she had the makings of an endless beauty in her. To the orthodox eye of her cousin she merely looked odd and a little untidy. She wore a long stiff gown of peasant cloth, it was her Sunday gown, and, to mark it as such, it had three rows of black velvet sewn round the bottom of the skirt. Her legs were encased in a pair of purple cotton stockings, her heavy leather shoes were full of nails. Her round straw hat, bought at the autumn fair, had a bunch of imitation forget-me-nots in it, and this hat was the only untidy thing about her, for Linda disliked wearing hats; her hair was so thick, so curly, that it seemed to rebel against the elastic, and to set the straw erection all awry. Her hair was of a dark russet brown, and broke into lots of little crimpy curls wherever it escaped from the two tight plaits. Her skin was white by nature, but the sun had turned it almost chestnut. Her eyes were large and dark, and full of a hundred questions.

"*Ask the maid to wash me!*" the child repeated once again, and then with a sudden instinct she burst into German. "Stupid creature!" she said, and stamped with her foot. "Didst think I'd do as thou told'st me. Didst think I'd listen to the likes of thee? No, I like thee, but

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I'd die sooner than obey thee when thou art only poking fun at me."

"Is that double Dutch?" asked Dudley, and Linda began to sob. She sobbed with passion and rage and real fatigue. She sobbed so hard she did not hear a running step upon the gravel path.

Joan James stood up in front of her brother:

"Dudley," she said, "how dare you! How did you dare to bully a girl!"

Joan's face was crimson. Her eyes seemed suddenly bloodshot, her pale face flushed to the roots of her hair.

Joan had that minute come in from riding. She held her habit high to her knees. Her hair was loose and fell around her in a red-gold cloud. She was barely fifteen, but a little sad for her age, and her figure was round and moulded like a woman's. When she was quiet and alone, her eyes had a wistful look in them. Joan was one of those rare human beings who seem to come out from the very breast of God, and go back thither early, wearied by all man's meanness.

There were only two things which excited the passionate rebellion of Joan. One was insincerity, the other unkindness. She had been delayed on her afternoon ride, and had arrived at the station too late to meet her people as she had wished. She had then ridden rapidly home, full of the joy and excitement she felt in seeing them all again. Her greatest joy was always to see her brother Dudley, and she had hurried into the garden to find him. Coming by a side-path, she had been able to catch the last words of the previous colloquy, and her heart revolted from her brother's lack of kindliness and courtesy. Dearly as she loved him, she felt nothing but contempt for him now.

Dudley muttered some explanation. He had a great respect for Joan:

"No," said Joan. "You were cowardly. Go in."

Then Joan came up to Linda and took off her ugly hat and tried to wipe her tears. A little later they went indoors.

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Linda was still sobbing in a sort of hysterical way. The beautiful, gentle kindness of her cousin seemed to make the outer world more, rather than less, lonely, and Joan said something to her which she never forgot.

"I am not always happy myself," she said when she saw that she could not comfort the little girl. "I once was in Switzerland, and I loved your people better than I can love my own—try to think what that means, Linda! But we must only try to go on being good even if it does not seem any use. If you will try to be good, Linda, I shall be happier." And Linda saw that Joan was crying.

And at whatever period throughout her future life Linda felt angry or cruel, she remembered her cousin Joan James, for exquisite human souls are rare, and children, whose little fibres are as perfect, acknowledge the influence of their contact when they meet them.

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PART II

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHILD TO WOMANHOOD

"Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity;
Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal Mind,—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life."

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

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CHAPTER X

THE BACKFISCH

TEN years passed by, and Linda was just eighteen. She was almost a woman. In some ways she had developed prematurely, yet there were certain childish things to which she clung with curious pertinacity. Her outward manner was that of a child. She was very fresh in her enjoyment of the mere daily details of living, and yet she was strangely indifferent to all worldly gaieties, or rather to those more formal forms of social meeting which a perhaps mistaken generation prepared for its young women in the Western world in the later years of the last century.

At the very outset of her life in England the experiment seemed to fail. Linda fell ill; and before six months were out she returned to her mountain home with the curls of her thick hair rather straightened, a little dry cough, and a restless, hunted look in her large eyes. This look was only a shadow of something much more sad and permanent in her future; but it frightened her Uncle Sebastian, and it was he himself, and not the English aunts, who hurried her back into "the bosom of her godly ancestry," as he chose to describe her Alpine belongings.

The doctor looked at his daughter.

"Did you like England?" he asked, and Linda said:

"No, and I won't go back there!"

He made no answer, but he turned from his child a moment and looked through the window where the snow was falling—white, silent, fluffy flakes, pure as the air they fell through.

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Presently the doctor turned again. In the room it was dark, and the child could not note his expression; also she was feverish, and saw only moving mental objects with yellow lights around them.

"Did it ever snow in England, Linda?"

"Yes," the child answered, "it snowed the day we were leaving; but then it was black snow. When we stayed in London I sat at the window and looked out, and the snow came down in black pieces, and when it touched the windows it was only water and all quite black, and the horses fell down in the streets. I saw a man pushing a woman under the window; and she fell down in the black snow, and when the policeman picked her up she was dirty. She was not white like I am white when I fall into the snow at home."

Then a small dry sob or groan escaped the lips of Doctor Caflisch: "My darling," he said, "you are home again with me now. Try to forget—you will easily forget the town and the people. The snow is white at home, Poppeli—just look at it here for a moment." He put his hand out on the windowsill, and gathered some of the light and lovely substance from the beams of the roof outside. It fell away in fluff upon the floor; and the tired child looked up and smiled.

"I'll not go back," she said bravely. "I'll stay with thee, little father. Where's Basil?"

Basil had been waiting in the living-room. He came upstairs and stamped in his heavy boots across the room, and stood up stolid and critical beside the bed.

"So it's thee," he said. And for the moment the position of the children seemed somehow changed, and the challenge of the talk came from the boy instead of from the girl. He put his hand in the pocket of his coat, and he picked out thence some heads of clove carnations which he had taken from his mother's plants in her cellar. He shook off the dust and the snow which had collected on the flowers in his pocket, and he laid them on the sheet beside Linda.

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"They are prettier than thee," he volunteered, perhaps in chaff, but also in some rude earnest. "Thou, Linda, art grown thin and ugly over there in England."

Perhaps the child was very ill, perhaps she was only tired and excited, but she got under the bedclothes that she might hide her tears. Her grandmother came upstairs and patted and caressed her, her father gave her old-fashioned syrups and possets, and her Aunt Christina sang a long, low, curious hymn which the child was fond of, and with which she had sung her to sleep in her cradle.

A month later Linda was herself again, trudging in a homespun gown along the village street to school, playing with the beans in the Emperor's barns, and preparing for hay upon the Alp in summer-time.

After that first trial Doctor Caflisch and Sebastian determined definitely between themselves that the child of this mixed marriage should at least spend the bulk of those earlier and most impressionable years of childhood in her Swiss home. Developments might follow with the dawn of stronger intellectual needs, but at present the freedom and the healing of the Alps should be hers unchecked.

Now and again Linda did travel across the Channel and spend some weeks with her English relations, but her stay was always short and took the form of a few weeks' holiday. As time went on, and as, to the outward eye, a great deal of the elegance and grace of her English mother began to show itself, she went oftener and stayed longer, and liked her visits better; and thus matters appeared to group themselves in a more or less satisfactory manner.

Linda's was not altogether a happy nature. Complicated to begin with, the complication was naturally strengthened by the contrasts of her surroundings and her own inclinations. As a young child, the life of the vigorous animal, the mere breathing in of sunlight and of cloud, sufficed, in the company of her peasant friends and cousins. But as she

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grew older, the intellectual side of her nature began to develop, and it inclined her, for the moment anyhow, to the presence and talk of her Uncle Sebastian, and to the big English house with its abundant books and pictures—perhaps, too, a little increasingly to the comforts and the luxuries which went with both. Children are not able to compare much or to dissect things, but this particular child, full of curious intuitions, was dumbly conscious of some strain and painful conflict in her inner nature—a strain nurtured and fully fostered by the contending opportunities of her two environments. And thus it came about that at a very early age she was already up in arms with her own quivering soul, and those who loved her best were powerless to help her.

Yet, taken as a whole, her childhood had been one of quite exceptional happiness. Perhaps, indeed, it may have been too happy, for the joys of a very joyful youth can linger on through the pains of later life, and become a tightening and even hindering restraint by contrast. Be this as it may, Linda grew up to all outward appearances in a manner to make most people love her. And if, perhaps, she was a little fearful to prudes, she was the source of general delight and encouragement to all honest and large-hearted persons.

I need not here describe the fashion of her life, for I have told it elsewhere, and age did not affect its outward conditions. She was the daughter of an educated father of old peasant lineage. She lived in an old community, surrounded by sometimes grim, but always real and splendid, natural things. It may be said that homespun of a most excellent quality, rather than any embroidery, had formed the foundations of her mental and her moral equipment. As far as money went she was a rich woman in her own right, but she was quite indifferent to money. She knew all her neighbours, and she took and shared the rough and tumble of their children's lives. Perhaps unconsciously she may have stood a little aloof from them, and she knew

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very little of ordinary chatter. Her connection with Basil grew slenderer as Linda came into her teens. Basil was five years older than she was, and so he left school earlier, and went back to work on his father's farm. Also he was sent for a year or two down into Italy, where the Emperor had property which the boy would inherit and must learn to understand. So Basil was busy, and although he did not forget—peasants do not forget—he only caught casual glimpses of his small girl friend; and, as the years passed on, he outwardly appeared to have forgotten her.

In England her cousin Dudley continued all the orthodox life of an English boy. He had always decided to serve in the Army, and upon leaving Eton he passed straight on into Sandhurst, got his commission in an Indian regiment, and very soon was sent abroad. So, as far as the mind of Linda was concerned, the image of Dudley became but a flickering if pleasing shadow on it; and the photographs of a very handsome young man, with a marked frown and a good deal of braid and belting, set in a silver frame on Mrs. James's mantelpiece, made no distinct appeal to a girl whose attention was turned for the moment to a world of books, and of French, German, English and Italian novelists and poets.

Her first great sorrow came to Linda when she was seventeen: Death, in the shape of a cruel personal loss, hit her straight in the heart, for Joan, her English cousin, died.

Joan had never been strong; there was some fatal malady hindering her flesh, and expanding her heart and mind too early. She was born for death, and yet no heart or brain were ever better fitted for a perfect life. I think, perhaps, that, like many as brave and sweet as she was, Joan was not sorry to be gone; but to the outward eye her illness seemed a sudden one.

"So strange! so strange!" her unhappy mother went on repeating. "Joan was always so gay and so strong; and I worried more over Susan and Dudley . . .!"

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Joan's death was the first acute emotional reality in Linda's life. It happened in the spring-time, and perhaps that is one of the reasons why she never could love the spring. Joan was ill for several months, but she did not appear to be mortally ill. About a month before she died, Linda had been in England. She kissed Joan in the dawn one winter morning. Joan was already very ill, but this the young child could not see; she turned her face to the wall and said nothing. That was not Joan's way at all, but she loved the little peasant-girl with all her wayward oddities, and she could not bear to part with her, knowing herself quite well that on this earth they would not meet again.

When the telegram came to Trins, and when they read it to Linda, she just looked out at the window, and she saw how a clump of yellow crocuses were pushing through a crust of snow in the churchyard. The sight became branded on her brain—she thought of that for a long time after, more than she thought of the death of Joan. But something in her nature was breaking. She never recovered from the pain and the cutting feeling at her heart; nor for years could she bring herself to speak of it.

Joan was the first vision of human godliness which ever vividly dawned on Linda's mind. It was a glimpse of that divine fire which we all of us are once or twice allowed to realize in the long tracts of our human experience. Unconsciously Linda had lived for and had worshipped this ideal, and all through her future she found herself seeking it. How often—how very often she sought for it in vain! for its semblances are very delusive, and even the best of people are inclined to worship Duty rather than Vision, whereas in Joan these two were combined. There was no human being who knew about the right and the happy things as Joan knew about them. There was nobody who laughed like she did. There was no one who *understood* with such a wide intelligence. Also, Joan was an artist. She could paint and write if she wished it; but she chose only

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to play, and everything that Linda ever knew about music she learned from Joan. It was because of Joan's playing of Beethoven's sonatas that the music of them would ring on Linda's mental hearing throughout every great emotional moment of her later life. When Linda did anything really unselfish she thought of Joan. I do not think that Linda ever did a mean thing, and I am certain she never harboured a cruel thought, but had she done so it would certainly have been Joan whose image would smite her both in pain and derision afterwards. . . .

Well! she had perished, and Linda was without her!

At the end of her Alpine schooldays Linda started for England, and she stayed there with very small interruptions for two years, learning with her Uncle Sebastian and various special teachers. She travelled a little in France with her uncle and with Mrs. James, but the latter had views on "finishing days," and her travels were somewhat restricted.

At the age of eighteen, Linda was full of undigested theories on the joy of living. She talked a good deal in odd, hurried sentences, which were always a little confused, and which only very partially expressed her real and better feelings. Throughout a healthy childhood she had held in great scorn every writing or discourse which bordered on sentiment. She skipped the love scenes in novels; loving poetry for itself, she read of passion for the sake of the sound of the words in which it was described; but she neither appreciated nor even guessed at their meaning.

Linda's moral nature—as shown outwardly in her sense of duty, and inwardly by her recoil from mean or cruel actions, and equally by any touch of slanderous talk—was singularly strong. She would never herself consciously do wrong, but she would certainly suffer from the wrong of others. To the end of her days she clung to a firm belief in the power of Good over Evil; but her religious faith was

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as yet quite unformed. She had vision, and much curious mystical intuition, which, in later life, found expression in the work of William Blake; but she was not what is outwardly termed religious. Her moral courage never forsook her—it seemed, indeed, at times to break her down and to fatigue her by its weight. It saved her, but at the expense of a spiritual fatigue so great that, in the end, her early and more faithful nature threatened to be dwarfed and stunted.

Linda stood now on the threshold of life, full of the mistakes of youth: expectant, that is to say, of pleasure; rebellious, too, to pain. Perhaps by a very surfeit of what she sought she was to learn the inevitable lesson of a struggling, baffled, but onward-pressing humanity.

For a nature of a kind like Linda's will have to accept, without understanding, the kicks of the world which come to it disguised as kisses. It will have to forgive much, and to pay for its smiles with often bitter tears, until it attain to that acceptance and to that peace which all the pure desire, and to that fulfilment which from first to last is the aim and the object of all brave and lovable human souls.

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CHAPTER XI

COMING HOME

THE snow was melting rapidly from the lower slopes of the mountains, for April had come. The roads were bare in the valleys, and the traffic running on wheels. The sun burned fiercely on meadows and on hillsides, which glittered like sheets of the finest spun glass. There was a great roaring and swirling of waters; and, although not a single cloud appeared, a loud hot wind rushed through the tops of the pine-trees, and hurried the heavy wreaths of snow from the rocks and the ledges in sheltered gullies.

The mountain world was heavy with child. Spring is not born easily in the higher regions of the Alps. It does not creep forth from the womb of its mother with a sigh and a smile, as in more temperate regions. But the babe comes forth amidst shriekings and groans, and the rendings of colossal fibres; and tiny spring-flowers quiver, and often perish, in the pitiless and the agonized rendings of the snows. I think that the miracle of the resurrection is better understood by a mountain peasant than it ever can be by a preacher of the lowlands, and the joy of Easter Day is intensified to him by the vision of the horror whence it sprang.

The diligence came lumbering and lurching up the road from Chur. The wheels made an unnatural noise as they turned on the mud, for under the mud the ice of winter lingered, and lots of little stones and pebbles fell from the slopes above the road, making the horses stumble. It was a bad time of year to travel, and Linda had the post-carriage all to herself. She was leaning her head out of the

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window to get a first sight of her home. She had been away for over a year, she felt excited and stimulated to be coming back again. It is a long year between seventeen and eighteen; and although she could not realize her own altered opinions, she nevertheless felt a strange blending of pain and of pleasure in the sight of her old home and her real fatherland.

Linda had always been good to look at, but at the age of eighteen she was radiantly and arrestingly lovely, even as youth, combining with mere physical health, occasionally can be. Her eyes had a strange and passionate appeal in them, her loose hair broke in curls across her forehead, but was gathered into a heavy plait at the back of her head. She was dressed, though very simply, with a distinct elegance and care; her figure seemed to throb against the little grey gown as though it barely brooked so much constraint as that afforded. There was a strange look of race and distinction about her. As she leant out of the window of the coach the sun burnt full on her face and scorched the tender skin until she flushed up crimson. She laughed to herself unconsciously. Perhaps the strongest force of her whole nature was a quite unconscious one—namely, the force of the untried powers of youth and of physical beauty.

Her father had come to meet her at the inn. As they stood in the street waiting for the luggage, a cart came rattling over the stones. A young man stood erect in the cart. It was Basil. He was driving a wild young horse. He had set his teeth and tightened all his muscles, and he only swayed a little as the cart shook up and down. The sun flashed full on his face and figure, and Linda and he looked into each other's eyes.

Basil knew nothing of Linda's home-coming. A sort of gulf had grown between them, but Basil was exactly what he always had been—a peasant—a man of the fields and woods, with a clear, sharp intellect and calm unruffled judgment. Linda was not a snob, and she was certainly no

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prude. She loved the land, and she liked her friends. It was life which had grown up between these two, not change or affectation.

When Basil saw Linda he loosened his hold on the reins and the cart swung sideways. But the young man did not fall, he merely swerved, recovered himself, and lashing his horse drove on up the valley.

A long while after, as he drove through the woods, a burning blush crept up from his heart and almost stifled him.

Neither he nor Linda had smiled at each other. She got out her rugs and walked home with her father. She unpacked her clothes and her books, and as she touched and smelt the pretty English stuffs and papers, a vivid affection for them possessed her, a sudden and horrible revolt from she knew not what in her home and her future life there.

But the feeling passed, and late in the afternoon she went up the valley. She walked quickly, picking her way through the mud and the stones on the road, and she was soon out of the village and passing up the meadow-lands. Wherever the snow had left the fields, the grass was full of crocuses. There were millions and millions of white and lilac crocuses, and all the little streams were fringed with soldanellas. Linda looked with a mixture of passionate love and of growing sadness on these familiar flowers. She knew in her soul that she understood them better far than she ever could or would the bluebells in an English copse in May, but still she felt confused and saddened by them. The south wind played across her forehead. A *Sehnsucht* for she knew not what possessed her. She sat down on some logs by the roadside and rested her chin on her hands.

As the sap rises up in the tender trees in spring-time, so does the blood in the veins of a human being. When we are very young we do not understand the spring; we think that we ought to love it, we think it will bring us something—that we too shall rush through the bushes like the courting birds, and bend, as the flowers bend, with the

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glowing weight of pollen. Later on we learn that because of our greater intellect we have a greater need—that the lives of men are less complete than those of birds and flowers, more exacting, less for a season, and fuller far of intense responsibilities. And after we have realized this the spring is painful to us. If we are unconscious artists, we gather ourselves together when we feel it coming as though we had to face a terrible lowland fever. The burden of the young earth's courtship bears us down and tramples on us; we faint as we see the lovers in the lanes, and we marvel at their courage. We sicken at the sound of the singing birds; and the startled eyes of the big brown thrush, who sits on her eggs in the elder-bush, burn into our souls like a hot reproach, maddening us by their maternal candour. As we grow old again and as the passionate fires burn low, we return once more to our love of the spring, and we warm our withering hands before that blaze we may ourselves no longer help to kindle.

Linda neither knew nor cared for musings of this sort about the spring. Her sadness was deeper, perhaps, because it was unacknowledged. She sat by the roadside pulling at her flowers. Presently she heard the sound of wheels on the road above where she sat, and looking through the trees, she saw a cart and Basil driving it; and a sort of unnatural fear came over her, but she sat quite still. Basil drew up beside her; he got down deliberately from his seat, he drew his cart a little aside, and, holding the reins, he stood on the bank beside Linda. He did not speak. He only fixed his eyes on her, and she, too, looked into his face. She saw that the colour of his eyes had changed, or perhaps she had not really noticed them in other days.

"You have got orange eyes," she said.

It was a strange remark wherewith to open conversation after practically years of silence. But Basil paid no attention to it. It is doubtful whether he even heard her. He

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simply went on looking at her. For a moment or more the sun flashed full on the faces of those two radiant human beings, and then it dipped behind the mountain-side, and as it did so the hot wind dropped and a chill grey light crept over the fields.

"Where were you going?" said Basil.

"Home," said Linda.

"Get up with me."

Linda climbed into the cart. She knew not how it was, but a feeling of excitement crept into her heart. Her brain, however, was calm enough. She seemed with her head to be measuring things with a rod, whilst a halo rested on her heart. In the whole of her future life she never had looked as completely lovely as at that instant, and Basil was the only man who saw her. He went to his horse's head and he looked at the bit, then he pulled the knots in its harness so tight they seemed like bursting. His teeth were clenched in an unnatural manner; the expression in his eyes was like that of some splendid falcon. He got back into the cart, took up his whip, and cracked it till the rocks by the roadway echoed, and the little pebbles ran down the water-courses. Then he stood up, quivering, and drove down the valley.

Linda looked into his face.

"You drive too fast," she said.

Basil did not answer her. He opened his mouth and shrieked aloud as peasants do. His soul, the entire strength of the man, went into the cry.

"Basil is in love," said some peasant friends who passed along the road.

Basil sat down by Linda. "Hold my arm," he said, "the roads are rough in spring-time."

Presently they came to a hill and began to go slower. Then Basil looked at her again. They were passing through an alder-copse. He stretched to catch a branch, twisted the twig in his teeth, then threw it at his horse's tail.

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"What's England like?" he said.

"England—oh, it's very green."

"I've been learning English."

"Learning English—*you* learning English!"

"Yes, I thought I might like to talk it if we ever went there."

Then a sudden terror, a revulsion, came over Linda. But rather than fathom the subject which disturbed her, she evaded it altogether.

"Is this a very young horse?" she asked.

But Basil did not answer her; he seemed to be smiling to himself and very much at peace.

As they neared the village he drove slower, and always slower. Now and then he looked at Linda, and then he smiled again.

But when they came to her house Linda jumped down, and ran to her room and locked and double-locked the door. She was ill at ease. If this was love it had come too early—she did not want it, would not take it. Her heart went out to infinite changes and not to a settling down. The very elements in her nature, which were seething and boiling in preparation for Life, subsided and became chilled by this first contact with it.

A strange and terrible revulsion swept over the soul of the child. All in a flash, as it were, a thousand questions, a limitless host of vague desires sprang into her heart and glittered and quivered before her eyes. And the village life and her own place there seemed as nothing—as things belonging to some other person, to a dead person who had died long ago. For the first time in her life she felt frightened of she knew not what; she even felt seized with a haunting terror of her own small body which trembled so across the bed. She got up hurriedly and went downstairs.

It was twilight. Her grandmother was in the hall pulling over some bundles of hemp. The old woman's cotton handkerchief had fallen from her head, and her neck looked

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like the neck of some weather-beaten bird with the scant hairs gathered in a tiny knot on the back of the head. The sight of this very old woman seemed at that minute amazing to Linda. She passed her swiftly, and went down the steps across the street to the garden. She pushed through the gate, and as she did so she noticed that it was rotting on its hinges, and that the withered leaves and rubbish of the past summer were lying in flat brown heaps, just as the snow had left them some fourteen days before. Through the dust and the refuse of the beds, through the sodden grass of the borders, a pale pink shoot of peony-leaf, a bright green blade of grass, shot here and there; but the general view of things was brown and desolate enough. Linda stood still in the middle of the garden, and a vision of the one she had left but a couple of days ago came back to her—a vision of tidy beds stuffed full of golden crocuses and primroses, of bushes bursting into bloom, and ivy green upon the walls. She could not escape the vision. She did not even try to; she went on calling new ones up.

The sun had long since set. A bitter wind full of all the ice of winter came wailing up the valley. The mountains seemed very near, their aspect was melancholy indeed, half brown, half white, half blue, like leprous men or things diseased, for the weather was changing as well as the season. The radiance of the afternoon had vanished utterly. The atmosphere of the Alpine world had suddenly grown impenetrable—inexorable and relentless as the sword of Justice. It seemed to throttle the passionate impulse of the girl's young soul.

Some peasant-girls passed up the street outside the garden. They were typical daughters of the Alps—weather-beaten, graceless, withered in their prime; they had been manuring the fields in the lower part of the valley, their big coarse boots were coated with mud. One of them stayed to speak to the doctor's daughter. "Ah," she said, "so you've come back home. You will have seen the spring in England? Well, here you'll have to wait a bit before the

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grass turns green again. The mists are more like autumn mists," she added, "and yet we are into April."

The peasant-girl could scarcely have selected a more ill-omened opening for conversation than this one. The words brought a lurid vision of the length of an Alpine winter and all its dreariness to the passionate mind of Linda. But the girl went on: "You look very pale, Linda. You want a bit of our mountain colour. There's Basil Castille who will take you a ride in his cart on Sunday. See, here he comes! He's grown a fine young fellow these last years. Don't you think so, Linda?"

But Linda never answered, and as Basil went stalking up the street behind his cows she only noticed that his brow, though perfect in outline, was already furrowed with lines like that of a quite old man. She remembered that mountain air furrows men's brows, and women's too; and deeper than ever grew her revolt, whilst the delicate flesh of her English mother quivered within her.

But the better side of her nature revolted from her own revolt: "I expect I am tired," she said to herself. It was supper time, and she entered the house. Her father scanned her narrowly.

"You got a lift home in Basil's cart," he said.

"Yes," answered Linda. Then almost unconsciously she added: "Basil has grown very good-looking. His eyes are quite orange. I had never noticed their colour before."

"Basil's a fine fellow—and he's a good fellow, too. He'll wear well, like his father."

"He's rather gay," put in Christina. "And he's not very careful. There's more than one girl in love with him already."

As her aunt finished this sentence it seemed to Linda as though a great weight had fallen from her mind, yet a little point of pain like that of some tiny stiletto pierced of a sudden to her heart. The last sensation vanished quickly, the former stayed. She drew a long breath. "I must go and see the Castilles—all of them, to-morrow," she said.

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Again her father gave her a long and penetrating look. Then he drew from his pocket a letter. "You may have to give some time to your packing to-morrow," he said. "What about a visit to Venice? I must go there myself on Thursday, and I thought I might take you with me."

Great news brings silence even to the lightest-hearted, and this was potent news to Linda. She had dreamed dreams, even as a baby, of Italy. The very name sent a tingle through her blood.

"Do you really mean it?" she said.

Her father passed her the letter. It was from his Cousin Walpurga, who, living in Venice where her husband had his business, was yet a familiar figure in Trins, as she always returned to the home of her childhood in the haymaking season. The letter contained full arrangements for the stay of the doctor and of Linda in the Palazzo Molinaro. There was, it is true, some mention of business, but to this Linda, breathless and seeing only visions, paid no attention at all. The stately figure of Walpurga—the aroma of southern splendour which surrounded it—was one of the heroic elements of her childhood. That she should suddenly be going on a visit to Venice as the guest of this noble woman was almost too great a joy to contemplate.

"When?" she asked.

"The day after to-morrow," said her father. "Don't crowd us with luggage. It is my holiday, remember, and we will travel easy."

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CHAPTER XII

THE DANCE

LINDA slept profoundly. She awoke refreshed and vigorous, and the morning was spent in preparations for her journey. Some impulse told her to have everything in complete readiness by noon. A sort of sprite-like call drove her to reserve the evening for her village friends—or rather for Basil, although she scarcely admitted this fact to herself. She packed, she strapped her trunk, and left her basket open for the night. She had lived quietly in England, and had gone but to one or two large parties. Just a week before she had "come out" at a rather dull and proper dance given in her honour by Mrs. James. It had all been somewhat flat and disappointing, although, of course, she had plenty of partners. She had worn a conventional white muslin frock, and a very stiff and tightly boned white satin bodice, in the fashion of those days. This dress she had left in England; but she folded, for her Venetian journey, something far more fascinating—a frock of the purest crimson silk, curiously cut according to her uncle's orders. Sebastian had brought her the silk from Smyrna—he said it was like, but better than, pomegranates; he said that young women who had dark hair and oval faces like Linda had, must always be attired in silk, the colour of pomegranate flowers.

"Going to Italy," Linda repeated.

In her heart was an ingrained love for the land so near to all our dreams. This love was actually in her blood, for all the inhabitants of these Alpine ranges which run down to the Italian plains have got a something of Italian fire in

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them—their skies are tinged with an Italian haze, they drink the wine-juice of Italian valleys, they sing their songs, they talk their language. There is scarcely a family in the Canton of the Grisons which has not sent its sons and daughters, too, down to the Italian cities for purposes of education and of commerce. These young people often choose their wives and husbands from Italian stock, sometimes they set up homes themselves in Italy, and live in vaulted palaces instead of wooden homesteads.

But Linda's love was inherited from both sides of her family, and it will be remembered how both Mary Crane, and Mary's mother before her, had travelled in Italy and had passionately loved Italian art and landscape. It would, therefore, have been difficult to discover any young girl at the dawn of her womanhood more steeped in a day-dream of Italy than Linda was.

"Going to Italy! going to Venice!" she went on humming aloud to herself. But quite apart from this tangible fact was a hidden and a no less potent one. Linda stood tiptoe upon the threshold of her womanhood; quite unconsciously to herself she was straining to see, she was straining to possess, what women possess and what women see. One of those almost uncontrollable instincts, which haunt all emotional beings, told her that she was about to touch on the very sources of human existence.

She went about her work with a quiet step and bearing, but a fire shone in her eyes. Far, far back in some region of her mind was a desire to see and to be seen by Basil. But the desire was unacknowledged even to herself. It was set aside and stifled as she packed her pretty clothes and papers.

The Föhn wind had ceased to blow. It had done its work and melted the snows. Once again the rent clouds vanished towards midday, and a beautiful warm sunshine flooded the valleys. A sweet hot scent of earth and of growing things rose up from the fields; and the small streams trickled gaily through the meadows.

Linda went to her room towards the hour of coffee. She

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brushed her hair, which was abundant as in her childhood, and she knotted it with a curious easy grace, in the fashion of her day, low down upon the neck. Then she put on her prettiest morning gown of serge, the colour of a gentian; she hung round her slender throat the golden chain which had belonged to her dead mother, and she went to her little mirror. How fresh she looked—how small and tender! Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were dancing.

She went straight down to the Emperor's house, by a path which led through the meadows. The small white crocuses were opening in thousands; the fields had a shimmer as of steel from all these flowers. And there were little gentians blue as lapiz, too, amongst them. Linda stooped down and gathered a bunch. She drew a thread from her pocket, and she formed a wreath of the exquisite blooms, which she pinned round her hair at the back of her head.

It happened that the Emperor himself was standing in the doorway of his house. He was no longer a young man, but his eyes were sharp, and he had been watching Linda for some years past. He watched her with mixed feelings. There was a clash of opinions in the mind of the canny old peasant, for to him the doctor's daughter was an unsatisfactory hybrid as far as her parentage was concerned. He was a Tory and he liked pure blood. Linda's could not be described as pure. But, then, she was rich, and she was not stupid; and these two last points were worth reckoning in her favour, though they were not enough. He stood quite still in the open doorway of his house with his elbows resting on the wooden balcony of the porch. The sunlight passed over him and entered the passage behind him, it fell quite full on one of the family pictures which hung by the corn-bin. This picture was the portrait of a weird little lady with yellow hair. She was a Venetian of good birth, and she had married a Castille early in the century. Her Castille husband kept a pastrycook's shop in a back

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street at Venice, and the lady and he had led a cat and dog life together for many years; but he had finally brought her to live for her last days at Trins. This proceeding hastened her death, for she died of the purest ennui. Unconsciously the Emperor's gaze turned back to the hall as Linda approached, and his eyes fell on the picture of the foreign lady. But he seemed reassured, and he went halfway to meet the coming guest.

Linda, as I have said before, was afraid of the Emperor. She blushed up crimson to the roots of her hair when she saw him. She would have taken the wreath of gentians from her hair, but she had not time to do this.

"I have only just come back from England," she stammered.

"England becomes you," said the Emperor with sudden courtesy, for even this hard old man was struck and silenced by the loveliness and freshness of the girl before him. And Linda blushed again. Beauty certainly had never got a tribute from a more surprising source.

"It's nice to be home again," she hazarded.

"Are you sure of that?" said the Emperor. He went up the steps and she followed him. His wife had just brought in the coffee. She kissed Linda a little sadly. Frau Castille had grown very thin and pale during the past two years; she was dying of a terrible disease, but she did not talk about it, either to her husband or her children. She put on the same stiff gowns which hung like cardboard on her withered figure, but she was always splendid in her bearing, and her beautiful dark hair was plaited in the usual faultless plaits above her brows. The Emperor certainly had a high standard in the choice of wives.

The Castille girls had grown tall and strong. Their clothes were badly cut, and made them square and hard about the breasts and shoulders. They wore heavy boots and coarse purple stockings. Their hair was parted grimly over their sunburned foreheads. Had they grown up in surroundings less austere they might have been beauties,

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like their Aunt Walpurga; as it was, with every disadvantage that rough weather, incessant work, scant joys, and months of shut-up rooms, and snow could give them, they yet retained a certain homely charm—a dignity which silenced adverse criticism.

Linda took her seat by the table. Frau Castille poured out the coffee and Linda lifted the pretty painted cup and looked at the flowers on its sides.

The sunlight came straight through the window at her back; her blue gown shimmered like silver, and her hair seemed all on fire.

"Linda has grown very thin," said Christina Castille at last.

"I wish I were," said Linda. "In England . . ." and she paused.

"Are the girls in England thin?" half-sneered the Emperor.

"Some of them—at least, they want to be thin. They play lots of games. It's easier if one is not so heavy."

"What sort of children can they bear?" said the Emperor.

At this minute a heavy tread was heard on the steps outside. A shadow fell over the window and Basil came into the room. He smiled when he saw Linda—the sort of smile of someone who sees the thing he has expected and wished for. "I thought you'd be here," he said, and he pushed past his mother and sisters and wedged himself in on the bench by the window, very near Linda. A faint smile covered the look of pain on Frau Castille's face. The girls looked across at each other. But the Emperor spoke out rudely to his son:

"You've done the work badly up in the wood," he said. "You've left the best bark of the tree on the ground. I was up there myself this morning. You had the horse and the cart, and could easily have finished the work in an hour or two. What brought you back so early in the evening?"

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Basil shrugged his shoulders. He pushed up his cup for some coffee, and as he did so, he jostled Linda with his arm. Instinctively she drew aside. He cut a hunch of bread and ate it slowly; now and then he turned and stared at Linda. When he had finished his meal he let his hands fall to his sides, and one rested full on her gown and she moved it away, for his hand was heavy and seemed to crush and crumple the delicate fabric.

"I expect I must go back home," said Linda.

"Oh, stay a bit," said one of the girls, "and we'll all go up to the dance together."

"What dance?" she asked.

"We dance sometimes on Saturday nights at the inn. It's a nice bit of floor; you'll soon get partners."

Linda was young. Diversion of any kind attracted her, and she listened to no warning voice. She forgot the thing which had so frightened and displeased her in Basil's manner towards her; she forgot her intuitive sense that the joys and the habits of her childhood were behind her for the time at least.

An hour later she went up the fields with Basil and his sisters. It was a beautiful spring evening, cold and still. All the gentians had closed in the meadows, but the grass shone green in the twilight. The mountains had lost the sordid look of the night before; fresh clouds were rolling over them, they seemed very far away and their outline melted to the sky, where scattered stars appeared to glimmer faintly.

"It will snow again to-night," said Basil to some young men who had passed them on the path. But they did not answer him. They stared at Linda as she came through the grass, then they joined the Castille girls and the two walked on alone.

"Why do you wear those flowers in your hair? They are withered," said Basil.

Linda put up her hand and took off the wreath of gentians.

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"I don't like that sort of wreath," said Basil abruptly, "I like the wax flowers that the girls wear here at weddings."

"You like wax flowers better than real ones?" said Linda impatiently.

But Basil was no great talker; and he did not wish to argue. He sighed peacefully, and they went in silence as far as the doctor's house, where Linda stopped to tell her father about the dance. She noticed that he smiled rather grimly when she told him where she was going, and with whom; but he made no real objection, and she soon went back into the street. She felt like a child, and even a naughty child. The atmosphere of the village brought back to her in a hundred ways the remembrance of her happy wayward youth.

"You like wax flowers better than real ones," she repeated. "Yes, I can remember quite well how you always picked the alpenrose and edelweiss rather than the really beautiful flowers in the meadows."

"Maybe," said Basil, and he looked down on the little figure beside him with a sort of delighted forbearance. "When the summer comes," he said, "I'll go to the Alps and I'll get a bit of white alpenrose—I know where it grows, but no one else knows: I've been watching it a long while—keeping it——," he paused. "I'll maybe bring the whole plant down," he said, "and you'll plant it in the garden."

"Don't," said Linda. "It can only die, torn up like that with all its flowers on it."

They had reached the inn by this time. From the upper room came the sound of a crazy violin played by some strolling player, and the heavy stamp of feet. At the sound of the music Basil caught Linda's hand in his and ran with her up the stairs, and they came to a low, hot room panelled with cembra-pine. It was on the north side of the street and dark already, although out of doors the twilight lingered still. An oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling cast a rather

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lurid light upon the scene. Some two dozen men and girls were there together, the girls sitting bolt upright against the wall, and one or two couples turned slowly, almost laboriously, in the centre of the floor. The spectacle was scarcely a gay one—the dancers looked sober, their limbs were stiff and deadened by hard work; but a sort of fierce human love burned in one or two of the hearts, and hand clasped hand with a touch which amounted to passion.

"Come," said Basil. He put his arm round Linda. He clutched her small cool hand, and he danced with her round the room. Always he seemed to be holding her tighter.

Her head swam: "I'm tired," she said.

"Tired," he repeated. "Why, the dance is only beginning."

"Stop," she said, "I'm dizzy."

But Basil went on dancing. Then Linda broke from his grasp with an effort. Something was singing in her head; something like a sob had stifled her. She was dizzy indeed.

"No," she said, "I shall not go on dancing with you. The room is hot. Everything is heavy. If you want to dance there are lots of partners. I shall look on."

She spoke in a hurry. She leant her head back against the wall, her hands held firm to the side of the bench. The lamp-light fell on her ruffled hair, on her small round figure in the dark blue gown, and the wonderful amethyst cross.

Basil looked at her, then turned away. For an instant he stood quite still, then once again he faced her.

"Linda," he said, "thou art but a fool."

His whole manner changed and he went across the room. A girl with great dark eyes was sitting alone on a bench. She wore a black velvet bodice, and there was something rather coarse about her; she was the child of some people who had come from the lower valleys and taken a little shop outside the village. Basil did not even ask this girl to dance. He pulled her up from the bench with a laugh, and they whirled and stamped round the room together. Linda watched them as though she were hypnotized.

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At last the tired fiddler dropped his bow. The dancers went off to another room where wine was sold at a wooden table; Basil and his partner went too.

And Linda got up, and went down the stairs. She found the front-door open, and she passed out into the street. The place was dark; it had begun to snow. Small flakes fluttered down through the still and quiet air. A strange—almost a deadly mist had fallen on the valleys. "It is winter again," Linda murmured to herself. She felt so strange, so giddy and bewildered, that she did not attempt to walk back home; she saw nothing, thought of nothing distinctly. The fiddler went on playing in the room above, and the feet thudded their heavy thudding accompaniment. Above all these sounds, the girl became conscious of others across the street. There was the wailing of a very young child, and the voice of its mother, comforting it. In the dull glimmer of the snow-storm Linda could distinguish the feeble light of watchers in the windows, and she realized that human life was struggling all about her. A sudden curious longing to be in the opposite house, to be the mother of the wailing child, swept over her, some prehistoric, almost animal craving entered her bewildered and expanding soul. Her head went up: "Mother," she murmured under her breath, "wife." Her eyes filled with a sudden glory in the darkness.

"Linda, you here! You out here in the dark and the snow! Didn't I tell thee thou wert but a fool?"

Basil had come down the stairs; he held a lantern in his hand. There was a smouldering fire in his eyes.

Suddenly he sat down beside her: "Linda," he said, "why dost thou act as a fool?" She heard him breathe. The snow fell thicker. She jumped to her feet.

"Yes," she said, "I expect after all I am one. Anyhow, to-morrow I'm going to Italy, and now I'm going home—now—this instant," she added, as she instinctively

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felt he had drawn nearer. To herself she murmured, "No, no, no—never." The wail of the child had touched her woman's heart, but the rude courtship of the mountain man had terrified and repulsed her.

In silence, and perhaps in scorn, they passed down the street and reached her father's door. There he paused, and turned the light of the lantern full upon her face:

"Good-bye, Linda Caflisch," he said. "Thou'lt come home. Thou'lt come home, right enough, and in thy proper time," but a light flashed back from his eyes, and Linda saw that something in his face had changed, and that, though hard, the expression was almost pleading.

"Good-bye, Basil." Then impulsively and in spite of herself she spoke her thoughts. "Oh, it is bare up here in springtime, and the work is hard, and things and people look often worn and as though they didn't know, or couldn't care, for all the pretty things and the fresh things, or just all those things which make life interesting. It cannot be wrong to go right away—or even to be thoroughly wicked and happy for a little while?"

An odd expression supplanted the pleading in Basil's eyes.

"*Neither of those wilt thou ever be*," he said.

And Linda said nothing. She gave him her hand and she turned back into her father's house.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE GATES OF ITALY

Soon after six the following morning they started away in the diligence. The dawn was dark and sullen. As they came into the broad valley of the Hinterhein it began to rain, and it rained all the morning. They drove through the dripping portals of the Via Mala, where the melting snows from every peak sent down cascades of water which coursed in jets and torrents over the perpendicular rocks and ledges, and splashed in the roads and rushed to join the Rhine. But later in the afternoon, as they began the ascent of the Splügen, the rain ceased; the clouds were riven and lifted off the peaks; the air turned icy-cold and clear; and when night had fallen there was no fleck of mist in all the sky.

They stayed that night in the bleak old inn at Splügen. The following morning they crossed the pass. The dawn had been still and cloudless, and the sun burned fiercely on the desolate rocks and moors as they passed the hospice. Dr. Caflisch had taken seats in the coupé of the diligence, and there sat Linda fresh and strong as they climbed the last spiral curve of the wonderful Alpine road in the early morning light. She felt like a person in a theatre: the curtain, she knew, was about to go up on the play of her vision of youth and of Italy.

Before she could well realize what had happened, they had crossed the summit of the Splügen and were rattling down over the dust and the stones of a genuine Italian highway. Huge granite boulders, hurled as it would seem by

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reckless Titan hands, now lay in magnificent abandonment about the straggling valleys. Here and there, on an almost perpendicular wall of rock, a slender campanile would arise amidst the gorgeous havoc, backed by the white-washed body of a church or chapel. Pines and larches suddenly gave way to chestnut-trees, and these spread their imperial southern forms, differing so totally from the formal lines of spruce that still guarded the higher slopes, over the rocks, and the little scattered meadows. In these meadows, where the short blades of the first spring grasses shot up green as emeralds, there were sights which made the heart of Linda bound against her side. There were thousands of white and lilac crocuses; there were deep blue scilla flowers, shooting amidst the husks of last year's chestnuts; and there were snowflakes, lemon-yellow, and short and firm upon their stems. There were millions of all these exquisite flowers.

The lumbering carriage swung on down the road. Dry dust flew up behind them. Here and there a torpid sulphur butterfly flapped above the dead leaves sunning beneath a wall. The valley widened, its lower skirts were fringed with vineyards; and they passed through cobbled village streets where children scrambled barefoot in the gutters, their brown limbs scarcely hidden by their crimson petticoats, their brilliant coloured handkerchiefs binding rebellious curls.

Linda made no outward comments. The reality was better than her childhood's vision. She felt half dazed, half wild with joy, when, just as the midday hour was tolling, they drew up in the Piazza of Chiavenna.

She followed her father and the landlord up the stairs. They went through high vaulted passages—for the inn was really an old palace—over the slippery scagliola floors, and into the large cool shuttered bedrooms. One of the rooms had a big stone balcony, and this one Linda chose for her own. Her father was talking to the landlord. She heard him mentioning trout and Asti wine; and it struck her as

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quite incredible that anyone should dream of food when reaching, as it were, the very gates of Paradise. She left her hat, she dropped her cloak. She went out on the balcony, closing the windows behind her. She sank her chin upon her hands, and, leaning her elbows on the broad palisade, she looked on the vision before her.

The sun had flooded the piazza at her feet with an intense spring radiance. Just opposite the inn there stood the ruins of the abandoned Salis palace. Above these rose the hill called Paradiso, with its terraces, its vines, and pergolas. Beyond and above this, tier on tier, first in vineyards, then in cascades of mighty boulders, then in chestnut-trees and pines, and last of all, in bleak brown slopes where the snows of winter lingered still in patches, there rose the barriers of the Alps. To the south again the sky was wider, and against it rose the campanile of the church, slender and tall, with that strange blend of strength and elegance peculiar to all Italian church towers. On the right, across the street, was a little old villa with wrought-iron gates, its gardens crowned by cypress-trees and bays and flowering bushes. Here on the steps of the villa a group of very old men sat huddled. They looked like the husks of last year's chestnuts, tumbled-down somehow because of the coming of spring. A few workmen were resting there, after their midday meal.

Ah! this was a key to the vision of that land which has called forth all the romantic enthusiasm of the North throughout the pages of history.

Linda gazed on and on. She had stood up to her full height now. In life she was actually seeing what her fathers had seen before her, but what she herself had only dreamed of. Her lips moved in inarticulate phrases.

And because she was in herself, for the moment, a vision, the people in the piazza, quick to detect, had stopped to look at her. A little courteous crowd had gathered below, for Italians neither conceal nor obtrude their love of human loveliness.

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A hunchback tailor, creeping out from his little cool shop in a back-street to feel the warmth of the piazza, had been the first to recognize the stranger; dropping his tape, he clasped his hands and gazed at the unconscious form of Linda:

"Un baccio, poi morire," he murmured, half in jest and half in hopeless earnest; then looking back, he passed on farther to crouch in the sunshine on the steps, and to watch, unobserved, the wonderful face of this new Northern comer. Some peasant-women, with high bell-shaped baskets on their backs, coming from work in the vineyards, also stopped. Still plying their needles, for they were knitting strange magenta stockings as they walked, they stopped below the windows of the inn.

"Ah Madonna!" one of them cried, "if our Lady had conceived a daughter she would have had a face as sweet," and they gave a little cry to turn the gaze of Linda, who, dizzy with new sensations, never suspected their notice. An old white-headed gentleman—the owner of the villa—came out to see his crocuses and tulips, sunning in the borders. Catching sight of Linda, he approached his iron gates and watched her keenly for some moments, with the penetrating, sympathetic gaze which old men give to girls.

Some young men, too, came out to stroll.

"Eyes!" said one, "eyes to turn one in and out of heaven."

"Skin!" said another. "A skin like the bloom on apricots in August! Ahi! ahi!" he sang.

The strange wailing call of the love-song made Linda start, and her eyes fell full on the little group below her.

The very simplicity of their interest and admiration won from her a like acceptance; the blood rushed to her forehead. She never forgot that moment; she stood up proudly on the little balcony, and beamed on the people in the square. The passionate love and admiration which she had given at once to their country, came back to herself from them again. And no young empress in all her

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diamonds of state, standing for the first time in the full light of the opera-house to meet the wondering welcome of her husband's people, had ever felt a thrill more exquisite. Her heart was in her eyes. With her strange, half-pagan nature, untortured by human pain, and totally untouched by ennui, she had found perfection—one absolutely perfect spot on earth, with a people, not scattered individuals, formed to fit it. There was no flaw within her crystal, as for one perfect second she held it in her grasp.

An hour later she and her father went out on the mountain-sides.

Linda, impatient for discoveries, led the way. They crossed the piazza and entered the vineyards at the bottom of the mountains; then they began to clamber up a winding path amidst the boulders of the opposite hillside. Primulas grew in crevices of the rock with heather, and here and there a cowslip, and beautiful shining ferns with gold and silver linings to their backs.

A splendid warmth, totally unlike the moist heat of an English summer or the pitiless scorching heat of her own mountains, poured upon the rocks and woods and vineyards all about her. The sky, restrained as it were to the north by the mountain ranges of Maloja and of Splügen, yet seemed illimitable, and of a blue bluer than any she had ever dreamed of. Large white clouds passed lazily across it, growing and shrinking and dispersing with a grand inconsequence. In shady places the air was cold and damp, not chill. The people who passed them on the road, carrying heavy burdens on their backs and withered with hard labour, in the excited eyes of Linda appeared to walk as the gods. The children wore no shoes but pattered by in silence, a very part of the nature they inhabited —brown curls, brown feet, brown fingers, and eyes which laughed and glowed.

Presently they came out on a little pasture high above the valleys. It was enclosed with a low crumbling wall of round stones. A tiny stream ran through the meadow. It

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was fresh with melted snows from the mountain-tops above, and it trickled in many little rills and natural runnels through the brilliant grass of early spring. The grass was enamelled with snowflakes, crocuses, and squills. The flowers were fresh and strong. It seemed as though they had been strewn there by the Alpine snow-winds, but that their roots had drawn in all the warmth and strength of the Italian summer sun, and thus they were as crisp and pure as any flower of winter could ever be.

Linda darted in and out among the flowers, singing to herself. Her father, sitting in the shade of a wall, watched her in deep thought. And as he watched, the memory of his dead wife returned to him, and it was with an almost timorous interest that he followed the living relic of their short span of married life, and contemplated the future of such a blend of alien races. Dr. Caflisch was not an imaginative man, but he dimly acknowledged the strain of something like a ruffled poetry in his daughter's mind, and it disturbed him.

Linda wore a thin grey flannel gown. She wore it as a peasant man might wear his homespun, not as some capricious fashion. Her whole pose was that of one whom no shackles yet have bound, and who has obeyed the promptings of her own nature whilst unconsciously rebelling against the dictated rules of all our opposing creeds. Yet she was at peace with herself and with the earth she walked on, for she had never stayed to fathom the responsibilities of our common existence.

The meadow path wound up a little farther, then passing through another stone wall it entered a chestnut grove, where trees, some of them of an immense age, stretched their bare branches over boulders smothered in moss and ferns. Here, beneath the shelter of a boulder which was almost a mountain, a rude stone hut had been constructed. The building fitted so well with its natural surroundings, just as a bird's or wasp's nest fits, that at first Linda had not recognized it as a human habitation. Then a small

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black dog, followed by its puppy, got up from the threshold and barked at her, and she saw the house and its inhabitants. A goat with her long-limbed kid stood grazing on the roof, amidst the slates and tufted saxifrage. Some tiny black hens with their broods of chickens crouched in the dust by the threshold; and on the doorstep itself sat a young woman, suckling her child. All about and above them the leaves and flowers of early April opened into being; the entire scene was one of peaceful maternity, at home with its surroundings and with the budding spring.

Linda stood very still. An odd feeling like a tiny electric shock went to the fibres of her being. How quiet it all was, and yet what a breathless pulsating form of peace! What fulfilment of real facts—what exclusion of mere aimless wonderings and fancies.

The young woman nodded to her, and mechanically Linda went towards her and sat beside her on the threshold.

"You have a beautiful baby," she said, hardly knowing why she said it, or even what it was that she was saying.

"The Madonna forgive me—yes," said the mother, and stooped to twist a little piece of red wool on the baby's neck. The white kid and the puppy, too, had pieces of red wool tied to their fleeces, for even here in this romantic solitude the powers of evil, human and profane, might penetrate to harm the lives of growing creatures. Linda, however, was unconscious of the blasting properties of praise.

"You live here—this is your home?" she hazarded.

"Yes," said the young woman. "This is my home."

"It is very beautiful."

"It is lonely. When I was a girl—before I married—I lived in the city. I lived in Chiavenna. Our house was one of the best in the piazza; then I married Giovanni. Now I live here; Giovanni is poor; I only go down to the town on feast days. But I have the babies."

"Oh yes," said Linda, "there are the babies. . . . Are they enough? I mean, do they make up? . . ."

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Girls marry young in the South—this mother of babies was but a year or two older than Linda; but in her eyes was gathered the wisdom of womanhood and much of its ancient dignity. She bent over the bundle in her arms, closed the bodice of her dress, and smiled the strange, half-melancholy, yet satisfied smile of mothers, as she rocked the child for a moment in her arms, then laid it back in the cradle on the hearth within.

"And you?" she said, coming back to the threshold and lifting a fold of Linda's gown as though to examine its quality. "When will you, too, be a wife?"

A pain shot back to Linda's heart. She felt angry; she knew not why, for this young woman was beautiful—and she loved beauty; she was kind, and Linda was ever sensitive to kindness. She did not answer the question.

"How many children have you got?" she asked.

"Two," said the woman. "It is but twenty months ago since Giovanni and I were married."

"And where is Giovanni? What does he do?"

"He works. He is at work all day round about in the fields here, and he has a vineyard lower in the valley. We are not so very poor, though my people said it would be hard for me. We have two cows as well as the goat, and we have all these hens too."

Linda looked back through the meadow whence she had come, away through the opening of the chestnut grove over the meadows where the snowflakes grew, and down to the valley and the plain. Italy was there, and art, and churches, and romance. It was hidden, but to the intuitive soul it was absolutely revealed.

Cows, goats, hens, and sheep. . . . She rebelled, she knew not why.

"I think I must be going," she said.

The young woman laid her hand on Linda's arm, then stretched and touched her hair, too.

"Ah," she said in a low, crooning voice, and her dark

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eyes smiled. "Your hair is thick and strong, your eyes are clear and beautiful. Your heart and soul are faithful, too—I know it. You, too, will find your Giovanni. But I think . . . I think it had better be with a house in the piazza!"

Linda started to her feet.

"Thank you," she said, "thank you very much. But I am content—content and very happy."

She went in and kissed the sleeping baby by the hearth, and, looking behind her now and again, she passed through the woods and back to the meadows. At the last turn of the path she paused and waved her hand. But the woman took up her knitting with a strange, restful look in her eyes, and only nodded her head with a sort of ruminating movement.

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CHAPTER XIV

AWAKENED

"Que m'importe que tu sois sage?
Sois belle et sois triste."

BAUDELAIRE.

THAT afternoon in the chestnut-woods above Chiavenna was perhaps the last pure hour of primitive and uncontaminated joy in mere existence which Linda ever knew. This joy which had possessed her through her childhood she now of her own self—though outwardly driven by an alien influence—let slip for ever from her grasp. Other, and possibly deeper, joys would follow in her womanhood; and the shadow of this old ecstasy would often fall upon her altered spirit. But as a permanent factor in her being it went from her that day for ever, and from that day she no longer trailed the more primitive "clouds of glory."

As Linda and her father passed in through the cool courtyard of the inn, they heard the sound of a piano. In the dim and quiet light of the sitting-room a man was seated at the piano, playing. Piles of music lay about him on the chairs and on the floor. The instrument was old and crazy, its tones long battered away by the irreverent uses of successive travellers; but even had its qualities been of the finest and most mellowed order, the sounds which it now emitted must have proved at best but a series of broken and distracted chords. From the whole attitude of the player, and from the disorder he had created around him, it was easy to divine that he was in search of some harmony, some strain or motive, which in his present mood it was distinctly improbable he would ever arrive at.

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"Is that gentleman staying here?" the doctor inquired of his friend the landlord.

"Yes, he has been with us for over a month."

"Does he play often?"

"Some days he goes on playing from morning till night. He has his own piano, but he prefers this old one. He says it gives him 'suggestions.'"

The landlord was a plain man, but he could catch up and repeat, without laying too great a stress on their absurdity, the remarks and idiosyncrasies of his guests.

"Some days he goes on playing from morning till night," he continued. "Once, for a week he did not play at all. He is out of health, and he tells me he has come here to rest. But Powers of Mercy! in what form does he take his rest! When he is not playing, he is walking; he goes out walking with the dawn, and comes back like a tramp in the late afternoons; he brings all sorts of roots and plants into his room, and old iron and drinking glasses. His dogs sleep all about his room," added the landlord.

Linda had listened eagerly to the details of this description, spoken as they passed up the stairs. To her they sounded romantic and extraordinarily attractive; almost unconsciously she had gone back to get another glimpse of the player. The sunlight, coming in through the wide arch of the courtyard, fell full on her eager face and figure; her hat had fallen back, disclosing her wide, questioning eyes, and the sunburnt glowing tints of her skin; her small grey travelling gown seemed all a-shimmer against the darker background of the passage.

The player paused a minute to watch her, then he began to play again, and the music seemed like the echo of some lost chord—the faint fulfilment of some happy and yet troublous dream.

Late that evening Linda went out into the garden of the inn. Considering the general beauty of the surroundings, and the rather grand style of the house itself, the garden

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was disappointing. It bore the stamp of a Swiss proprietor, and, as far as it could, it shut out the romantic elements of the landscape beyond it. But Linda was not in any mood for criticism. She passed round the gravel paths in the gathering shade of the spring night, brushing, as she went, the bay-trees and the heavy scented shrubs and bushes. She did not note the dullness of the evergreens, nor the tawdry shapes of the little iron chairs and tables. The light was very dim, and the giant orange moon just rising over the mountains but barely illumined the outlines of the garden, and left the details hazy and romantic.

Linda was not conscious of her state of mind, but it was really like a blank sheet of paper which would take but certain distinct impressions, and which must be written on with the pencil of vague emotions only.

Presently a dog came pattering quietly over the gravel path from the house. He was a beautiful German boarhound, with smooth blue coat and powerful jaws and feet. He began to fawn on Linda, pawing her knees with first one paw and then another, and rubbing his great head up towards her face. Linda was quick to obey this silent invitation to a game; she began to run, and the dog followed her, barking and plunging against her side. She ran very quickly, laughing aloud and encouraging the dog to further antics. It was almost dark, and the lights appeared one by one in the house. Presently their circles carried them round the window of the dining-room, and Linda paused, for she found herself suddenly confronted by the player of the afternoon. She was dazed by the light; she drew herself up breathless, eager, and rather shy, and looked straight into his face. She seemed to discover something there which she had known or dreamed of many years ago. The stranger himself bent forward, watching her intently:

"Tell me," he said abruptly and almost discourteously, "who are you?"

"I," she said, "I am Linda Caflisch."

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"Of course," he answered impatiently. "No, I did not mean that. What I meant was, what are you?"

"I don't know what you meant," she replied, getting a little angry and moving away.

"Don't go," said the stranger hurriedly. "Once—ten years ago—— But never mind. Listen. You did something for me to-day—you gave me one minute of happiness! You reminded me of something—of someone—who was dear to me—who . . ." He turned abruptly, as though impatient of himself. "You are a child," he said. "Why should I talk to you in this way!"

A day or two ago Linda would have been the first to echo: "Why?" But now she found herself speechless. She stood, half angry, half irresolute, in the middle of the path, all the light from the lamp indoors falling upon her eyes.

"Finish your game with my dog—he likes you," suggested the stranger. "God knows *I* play very few games with the poor devil."

"How did you know that I was playing games?" said Linda.

He did not answer her. He merely watched her ceaselessly.

"Take the dog if you like him," he said. "I should like to give you something that I thought you liked."

Then Linda felt roused: "But you can't give away your dog like that," she said. "You must love him. Surely you love a dog, if you take the trouble to keep one."

He did not answer her immediately. Then: "I have been speaking to your father," he said. "I want to talk with you now—really to talk. Will you let me?"

"Oh yes—why not?" said Linda rather ungraciously. In her heart she was pleased, flattered, disturbed.

"But it is chilly for you out here; let me fetch you my coat."

"Not your coat," said Linda. "Also, I am never cold."

They sat down on two of the little garden chairs. Von

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Herder put his elbows on his knees and rested his chin in his hands, and he stared into Linda's eyes as though he would read her soul there:

"How old are you?" he said at last.

"I am just eighteen," she answered. As von Herder watched her a strange deceptive calm came seething up in her brain—perhaps a touch of something hypnotic. This stranger, with his quick strange ways and sudden questions, did not surprise her. It seemed to her as though she had always known that someone would come into her life and speak to her just as he was speaking. She looked at him calmly; his eyes were quiet, like leaves which cease even to quiver when a storm is brewing.

"Eighteen," he repeated. "Is it possible!" Then he started. "Look at me," he said. "Look straight into my eyes. You do not trust me. Why don't you trust me?"

"I had not been thinking about you," Linda answered simply.

"Yes, you had. You thought about my dog. You told me that I lied when I asked you to take him as a gift. . . . And why should you trust me after all!" he continued, pushing back his chair. Then suddenly he leant forward. "One thing more," he said. "Why are you yourself?"

"Myself?" repeated Linda.

"Yes. Who made you so? What are you?"

She did not answer him this time, but a curious conviction of her own identity throughout all time possessed her.

"Where did you get the look in your eyes? How did the pain come there?"

"Pain?" she repeated, barely understanding him.

"Yes, pain. You who are so well—so happy—what did you see in your short life to give you the look of pain?"

Then Linda felt roused. But she was roused not from a dream but to one. Suddenly she saw the things which most had hurt her in her life. And these things were nothing to do with the human heart; they were all outside

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impressions, they were ugly things, or they were dull things, and they centred nearly entirely in England. She saw rows of dingy houses, street-corners and suburban places; dreary people passed her—some were overdressed, some not dressed enough; she saw things made wholly by men without imagination, and without ideals; she saw dusty streets at the end of long hot days; she saw all the many things by which a man may hide away his healing sense of natural loveliness.

And, together with this vision, there came, thrust in upon her inner consciousness, a vivid realization of self. It seemed to her that she was not really human, as the people she had known from her childhood were human. She saw them pass before her: her father, her aunt, her school-friends; Dudley too, and her Uncle Sebastian—but he was different. She dimly felt that she loved none of them with all her soul and all her heart as passionately as on some not distant day she could and would—love someone. So far the only human beings she had loved in any strong enduring way were Joan and her Uncle Sebastian, and her father because he belonged to her.

Yet there were thousands of natural things which somehow powerfully moved her. She knew what a deep and satisfying pleasure came to her in woods and in meadows, and on winter nights in mountains. The light which lingered there was more glorious far than any light on any human face, for Linda had never known a mother, and I think it is only in a mother's eyes that a young child reads the depth and the protection of human affection.

As Linda suddenly thus began to think, there flashed to her heart some crying need for human love—for something which would take and hold her, for something she, too, could give back again. She, herself, had been much loved in certain ways; the power of love she knew was in her. Basil?—no, not that. This stranger? No—no! . . .

She got up hurriedly from where she had been sitting.

"Put aside the pain," suggested the stranger. "There

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are plenty of excellent pagan persons who never even heard of the doctrines of the Crucifixion. Also some people—you for one—are far too lovely to be sad."

Linda went back into the house. She went straight to her father's room.

"Father," she said, "who is that gentleman downstairs—the one who was playing? I don't like him at all."

"Why, he's an old friend of yours," the doctor answered, looking up from his writing. "Don't you remember Count von Herder?"

Linda had only been a very little girl when, in one of her first rebellions against the shackles of civilized English life, she had broken the bonds and wandered away through the streets of Chur on that July morning to look at the little white pillar in the crypt, and to hear the tales of the Cyclops, so opposed to the spirit even of the rambling Catholic cathedral. But even had she retained any distinct outline of the rather unkempt Austrian student of those dim days, she could not now reconcile the memory with the romantic and weary being who had suddenly come into her life, talked to her so intimately about herself, broken in five minutes the barriers of mere acquaintance. She could not get his image out of her head, do as she would; and yet it was late, she was physically tired, and anxious to sleep. She saw von Herder—nothing but von Herder. She saw his tall thin figure with the stooping shoulders, his eager, restless eyes, his mouth with the pain and the ennui in it; and she heard his hurrying and impatient voice. Every word which he had spoken came back to her with poignant memory. But if he had intended to impress his own unhappy image on her brain—or worse, upon her heart—he had failed in his purpose; and had really only exposed to view some hidden sources of unhappiness or failure in her own soul.

As the former history of von Herder does not concern the present events of my story, I need not tell it at any length.

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It will be enough to say that, owing to a succession of unexpected deaths and changes in his family, he had suddenly found himself in a manner absolutely unforeseen at birth, the only surviving representative of an illustrious, if somewhat dissolute, race. Count von Herder, from being but a poor and very loose-living student, studying medicine at a French University, had, but a year ago, become the sole owner of a very large property, and of its innumerable castles and possessions—the accumulated wealth of an ancient and not over scrupulous race. The moment had come, and the full opportunity, to make a fresh start and to redress a vagrant youth. For the time, however, he did none of these things. He merely played ducks and drakes with his pounds as he had done with his pence before them. But before he had finally finished this career he paused, for he had entangled himself in a false connection from which death that spring had set him free. He had played with the hearts of many women—but it was something in the death of this one woman, much more wicked and abandoned than himself, which made him pause. At the death of this lady—she was a very great lady too—von Herder told his servant to pack up various possessions, for he was about to travel. First he went to the Engadine; then he came over the passes, and he found the fine old inn at Chiavenna, and the complete solitude which for the time suited him.

At the moment when, flushed with all the living joy of a natural world, so infinitely more beautiful than any she had ever dreamed of, Linda went back to look at the unknown musician, von Herder was engaged in seeking for some lost chord which should express the only absolute harmony which he himself had ever known—namely, a pure and genuine love for a very good woman in the days of his youth. Just at that moment he turned, and was met by the steady gaze of Linda. Her candour, her unconscious beauty, answered the very thing he was seeking for; an almost ferocious purity in her expression, combining

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with a veiled prophecy of all the love of woman and all its possibility of pain, stirred some old chord within him. Without waiting to think of the pain that talk like his might bring her, he embarked on that strained intercourse.

Von Herder had not forgotten his summer at Trins. He remembered quite well the home of Doctor Caflisch; he remembered the little daughter with her great questioning brown eyes; he remembered the incongruous English family, and Sebastian, and all the general problems created by an unusual social situation. He remembered Basil, too. But much had crowded his life since those days. His memories were disjointed, and scarcely tallied with the calmer courses of reality.

No sooner had Linda left him than he momentarily forgot her as an individual woman; he called his dog, and he went out into the sleepy streets to arrange with a certain postilion in the town about a carriage to meet the steamer which was to take him on to Como in the morning.

With Linda the thing was very different. She had had a long and tiring day, one in which the emotional or mystic sense had been stirred to its very foundation. The sudden descent from the decaying winter snows, the cataracts, and pitiless desolation of the summits of the Alps, down into all the luxurious loveliness of Italy, must excite and even intoxicate minds far less impressionable than that of this strange child. And Linda's mind had, up till now, been impressionable in only one distinct direction—namely, that of natural beauty. On the top of this Italian pageant—in fact, in its very foreground—had appeared this strong, this almost poisonous human influence of Count von Herder. His was a personality of a sort different, but somehow peculiarly attractive, to her own, and it had been thrust at a moment of almost mystical exaltation into direct communication with hers.

Von Herder had been the human means of waking her

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dormant woman's nature. Basil's passion had surprised, it had not really awakened it.

It was an absolutely still spring night; Linda went out on to her balcony and looked into the darkness of the square. The air was chill; the top of the campanile stood out white, and the tips of the distant mountain-sides were white, too. The waning orange moon rode over the opposite hillside, casting a mild weird radiance on the objects in the square. They looked very cold and dead. The walls of the villa stood out white behind the bays and cypress trees. There was a light in one of its windows, otherwise the town seemed all asleep.

Linda went in and looked at her watch. It was eleven o'clock. She started. She was not usually a dreamer of day-dreams—indeed, her life was very calm and regular, considering her temperament; but to-night she could not sleep. She took her Bible, but she could not read. She knelt by her bed, she did not pray. A dread and a heavy silent fear came over her; she went again to the balcony.

Down in the square there was music. Someone was standing in the shadow of the opposite wall playing on a little twanging mandolin. The notes fell shrill, and a little mechanically, upon the silence of the spring night; the voice which sang to the accompaniment, though low and mellow, was passionate rather than tender.

"Era di Maggio," it sang. Then, leaving the more modern and operatic music, it broke away into a wailing Umbrian refrain. "Se siete buona, come siete bella. . . ."

Fascinated by the novel sounds, by the romantic Southern scene, and the plaintive voice of the invisible musician, Linda crept back into the shadow of her room and listened.

"Era di Maggio." Yes, in May, with roses—roses everywhere upon the terraces—within a woman's hair.

And then again: "Se siete buona come siete bella." "Good—beautiful—young women beautiful and good, with eyes which made their lovers fear. . . ."

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Surely this was the better way of love? Surely there was nothing here of cows and pigs, of the manuring of the fields and the consequent gathering-in of crops and hay?

The singer wanted that thing—love—of the woman he loved; he never seemed even to consider the existence of the last. Linda could realize that, just as she could realize outward beauty and even religious fervour; she could realize the outward ideals of human love; the practice of the real was abhorrent to her, and it was solely on the former train of thought that, after her long and memorable day, she finally fell asleep.

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CHAPTER XV

THE GIRL'S BROKEN MIRROR

WHEN Linda awoke the sun was high. Her father, astonished at her lateness, had come to her room at eight o'clock and left her sleeping peacefully.

Linda had dreamed, as it seemed to her, an interminable dream. She had passed through many towns in search of things she could not find. She had never been able to emerge into open country; sometimes she had been in long dark passages and dusky, empty streets; at others in halls, lighted by circular ceiling windows. At length she had come into a little meadow high above the forests; and there a sudden light—the sun upon her bed—had wakened her. Waking, she remembered the night. Her old heart—that of the rebellious child—beat up strong within her breast; she dressed in haste; she felt angered by her own vague follies, and hurried down to find her father.

"You look rather pale," he said. "The sun and the walk overtired you yesterday."

"No," said his daughter, "it is the sun I love. And I want to walk still farther to-day."

In the afternoon the doctor and Linda wandered up through the chestnut-woods to the spot where they had stayed to rest the previous day. The doctor sat down to rest by the wall, for he was a tired man, and every instant of his holiday was precious to him. But Linda wandered up and down the meadow. She was looking for the flowers she had found the day before; she did not seem to find them now, or if she did, she did not want them for her own. The day was not different from the day before. It had been hot and glorious then, it was as glorious now. Yet for her it

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had changed; things were much more beautiful, but they were not complete. She saw little gold mists over Como which she had not noticed yesterday, a thing like a halo over the south, and an odd hard light towards Maloja—a light cold as the North from which she came, and shrank. She saw a strange and tender bloom above the lower copses, and in the flowers a certain fragile pleading which made her stay her hand when just about to pick them; she saw how the crocuses and snowflakes stretched like a cloud, as far as the eye could reach, in the chestnut-woods. But none of these sights sufficed her; for an ache, a void, was in her soul—a desire to share—a sense of the need of human contact—which never till now had she consciously dreamed of.

She went softly to the gap in the wall whence she could see the cottage of the young woman she had been with yesterday. The door was closed, the white goat tethered. It was evident that its inhabitants were away. And Linda felt glad; she had wished to see them, and yet she was glad that they were away.

From all these things it might be supposed that Linda had fallen in love. This was not at all the case. What had happened to her was different. It must in any case have happened sooner or later in one form or another, and through the first purely intellectual and nervous medium she encountered. Von Herder, in ten minutes' talk, had exactly touched and played upon a string in Linda's nature which had not been brought into use before, but which was only waiting to give forth its sounds. His mere presence had disarmed her previous self-assertion; and, by a few idle words and looks, he had opened the flood-gates of the nature she inherited from her mother—a nature sensitive, self-condemnatory, vivid, and emotional.

From that day onward Linda ceased to be self-sufficient. Her outward appearance altered, too; and a wistful look crept at times into her eyes. She listened more to other people, studied her relation towards them more; became

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aware of those thousands of little points of contact which form our human lives. But at the same time she grew doubly impatient of what was merely material. She was often eager and intolerant; but at the back of her mind there was a constant irrepressible question.

The afternoon soon deepened into evening and then to night. Linda went early to bed; she slept profoundly and woke in the morning fresh, and calm, and happy. It was Sunday, and the bells of the church in the piazza were ringing for early Mass. Linda got up quickly and dressed, and she went out into the dew and the sunrise, and down the street and through the cloisters into the church. The sun struck full on the tower, and aslant again through the dew-laden air into the side-chapels, where the skulls and cross-bones of many long-forgotten men lay piled in fantastic heaps and patterns behind their iron railings. Some old women in checked cotton aprons were mumbling over their beads as they tottered through the cloisters, and one or two young women too, in black gowns with black mantillas over their hair, went forward with quick graceful steps and passed in under the heavy leathern curtain. Linda followed them. Her soul seemed heavy with peace and prayer. As she passed by the font an old man offered her holy water with his palsied fingers. Almost unconsciously she took it, crossing her breast as she did so. Then she knelt down on one of the benches; she seemed half hypnotized by some holy and remote influence; she noticed the crimson damask on the pillars, the crumpled stone pavement, the old worm-eaten benches; but the tawdry decoration and false flowers escaped her notice, or at least harmonized with the whole and with her mood. Long after the priest and most of the people had left the church, Linda lingered on. She had got her English version of the "Imitation," and she opened on the words: "Keep pure and free within, and entangle not thy heart with any creature."

Towards eight o'clock she left the church, and came out

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into the warmed and sunlit world. In the garden of the inn Count von Herder sat installed.

"Ah," he cried, rising to meet her, as she prepared to pass on up the stairs. "It seems an age since you and I saw one another. Stay out here and talk a little. What do you want in the house on a morning like this? Such a morning! Only looked at it! See, I will order your breakfast with mine. It tastes divine on this tin table."

Linda hesitated. "Your father has had his breakfast," von Herder explained. "He told me to tell you he had gone out on business. So you have nothing to do but to stay with me. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

Linda sat down in the shade of the lilac-trees. Von Herder watched her.

"How can you wear such a terrible hat?" he asked. "One can't see you in it. Well, where have you been?"

"Where have *you* been?" asked Linda.

"My poor child," answered the exhausted man. "I have been farther than was at all necessary."

"You look very tired," said Linda. "It's stupid to go so far."

"Yes, but you who look so fresh and radiant, where have you been?"

"To church," said Linda, and she lowered her voice and wished she had not had to say this—why she wished this she did not know.

"To church," repeated von Herder, and then he bent across the table and looked up under Linda's hat. "Do you pray in church?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered slowly. She felt that church and prayers and Count von Herder were things very far apart.

"I won't ask you to pray for me," said von Herder, "I should need too many of your prayers. But here's your breakfast, and here's something I got for you in Milan," he added, as his servant brought a magnificent bouquet of white and of crimson camelias, and put it on the table beside her.

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"Oh, oh, oh!" said Linda, and she took up the flowers and touched them with delight. For an instant she looked like her little old self, like the peasant-child von Herder had led through the streets of Chur. A painful sudden pang went through his heart. He pushed his breakfast from him and bent across the table.

"Listen," he said, "in case you see more of me. Try to remember that I am a wrong-headed man. My soul is all mixed up with mud, and your soul, if I put it beside my own, is like the whitest of those white camelias which you have got there in your hands. Your soul is like your own deep winter snows, it is like the spray of your waterfalls in your forests which no man sees."

Linda was drawing back from the table, frightened yet fascinated by von Herder's words. But he put his hand on hers:

"Your soul is ill," he said very slowly. "Most people's souls are ill. But yours is very ill. You will see this later on in life. You do not know it now—how should you?"

"I don't know what you mean, or what you are talking about," said Linda hurriedly. She had never thought of souls in this way.

"You have the strength to suffer," said von Herder; and then he got up, for someone had called for him.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE VILLA AT PLURS

"And while the black night nothing said,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom, it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever, moans, and infant wails,
Of births, and deaths, and bridal nights."

THOMPSON: *In the Room.*

THE following day von Herder drove Linda up the Val Bregaglia, her father having business in the town. Linda was wild with pleasure at the prospect, for von Herder spoke of a romantic villa in the chestnut-woods—a little earthly paradise which in some dim future he himself half hoped to purchase and inhabit.

Driving with Count von Herder was not a humdrum matter. He had hired a little baroccino from a friend in Chiavenna, and in it he drove a very large and high-spirited young chestnut, which, as Linda fully realized, chafed at his impetuous hand. A large hamper, containing a very luxurious meal of champagne and Milanese sweetmeats, was packed behind. As they proceeded almost at a hand gallop up the valley road, dust, hens, turkeys, beggars, dispersed with yells before them. It was remarkable that no fatality occurred, but von Herder was a better whip than he appeared to be. He wore a large straw hat like a peasant's hat; when he spoke to Linda he stooped a little so that he might see her face; and his words came jerking

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out quickly and a little ill-judged, but always personal, for they were made and meant only for the person he addressed. They drove on and on up the marvellous mountain valley. They crossed the Swiss frontier. Gradually the chestnuts dwindled and gave place to larches, then to pines. The sky was blue above them, not a cloud.

"What is the matter?" said von Herder, peering into his companion's face. A change had come there, a distinct shadow obscured her hitherto delighted eyes. At first she did not answer, but her companion persisted; then she broke out:

"We are leaving it—leaving it all already!" she exclaimed. "Oh, let us go back to the vines and chestnuts. I see the pines, and the meadows are all brown. Look at the people!" Two women of a distinctly Swiss type with straight, uncompromising hair passed them at this moment. "Let us go back," she repeated. "I have got to live in this thing soon enough."

She spoke as though she had left the warm embraces of a lover to come into the narrowing limits of a middle-class and quite unbeautiful family circle.

"Yes, I see—I understand you," von Herder suddenly said. "But you're a funny little woman all the same."

With a sudden most violent movement he turned his horse's head, and this done he stopped and looked at his companion narrowly. She was blushing like any spoilt child might:

"You hate it—you hate your home. It is not ugliness you hate, it is familiarity—it is 'every-day.' But listen to me." Von Herder put his hand on hers almost reverently. "Your heart is there, and you will come home. You will weep more tears for the mountains than ever you did for the plains, or for cities, or even for what you now esteem as Beauty. Come," as he gathered up his reins, "I, too, love Italy; with passion I love Beauty. Come. It was, anyhow, time to be turning."

It was not till a sudden turn and a more rapid fall of the

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valley had brought them back into the first vineyards and the chestnut-woods that Linda turned to look at the scene they had so abruptly abandoned. She felt so gay, so irresponsible, that it was as though she had actually left her conscience along with the pines and the harder sky. "You will come home," von Herder had said, and these were the actual parting words of Basil! Ah! but the future was a long way off; the present was in her hands, a source of glory. She sat up keen and strong in the carriage, looking ahead towards the plains. And what Basil said did not, after all, much matter; and what von Herder said . . . Ah, he was wild and full of fancies.

They rattled back through the streets of Castasegna, and at a wayside inn a little farther down the valley von Herder put his horse up. "We will eat a great deal here," he said, "and after that I will show you something which I quite believe will make you wretched—it made me so when first I saw it. I wanted it so much for myself. Now I don't want anything for myself particularly; I am too unhappy—do you understand me?"

He was pulling his elaborate luncheon-baskets out of the baroccino, and he seemed more anxious about the state of the cork of his champagne bottle than about that of his soul which he so continuously described. Linda, however, herself vibrating to a million emotions, believed what he had told her.

She was sitting by a wooden table, straining her eyes to behold all, and more even, of the splendid pageant of rock and meadow, boulders and stream, than they could rightly compass. She dimly felt that Nature being so absolute and so perfect, the soul of a grown man must needs be sick and sorrowful; yet her own soul was full of gaiety and excitement. When their lunch was ended von Herder started hurriedly upon his walk. "I am going," he said, "to show you the Ideal Home. But it is a home for lovers, not for the marriage state. Never marry—remember that; it would drive you mad and make you even madder than you

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are. Be an old maid and live in the place we are coming to. No, that wouldn't do either. The place wants life and mandolins. *English old maids living in Italian villas!* . . . Oh, Dio mio!—the dreariness of the whole thing! They do it, though, in shoals! Don't do that. Live with plenty of friends. And be sure to have plenty of money. Don't try poverty—it doesn't pay. What were we talking about? Oh, I forgot; I told you, to begin with, to forget what I said to you."

Linda, as a matter of fact, had hardly caught the disconnected phrases of von Herder's talk. She followed him lingeringly up one of those gentle mule-tracks, paved with rounded cobble-stones and crossed at regular intervals by straight stone bars, which lead so often through the meadows and the chestnut-woods of Italian valleys up to some pilgrimage church—some shrine or villa. The light of the spring afternoon was warm and quiet, sobered by the power of its fecundity. When now and then they crossed a stream, or the shadow cast by barn or boulder, a distinct chill caught the air. It was a splendid chestnut-wood through which they passed; above it towered huge granite crags, a part of which had fallen once upon the village of Plurs, destroying it and leaving, as the only relics of that beautiful and luxurious little city, the campanile of the church and the splendid villa for which von Herder now was bound. The path took a turn, and they stood between high stone walls, the one the front of a curious rambling house, the other of its garden over the way. Von Herder rang the bell, and after a little time the door opened slowly, pulled by some invisible hand within, and they saw into the paved court and the sunny garden, and passed into the cavernous entrance hall of the villa.

What had made men build such a palace—so roomy, so magnificent—here on this forsaken mountain-side? It was no foolish "folly," but a sumptuous pleasure-house, perfect in all its parts, such as one sees scattered about in all sorts of remote Italian villages and cities. A large fountain,

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guarded by the figure of a triton, stood facing the entrance-door, carved in the natural rock of the foundations, and from thence the broad stone staircase led to the banqueting-rooms above. The walls of these rooms were covered with frescoes, and in the seething light of the spring afternoon the figures there depicted seemed to sway and hum and live again. Huge, half-naked forms of warriors with helmets and steel breast-plates; ladies with full bare bosoms forced up by gorgeous gold-brocaded bodices, supping the crimson wine at table, pushing aside, with rounded elbows, the nuts, pomegranates, grapes, and apples, which lay upon the gold and silver plates beside them. And dwarfs and children leading dogs in leashes; and boars' heads, and dressed peacocks on the sideboard! What a rout! What a vision of things which probably had never been, all mocking the silence and the total remoteness of the actual life about them! Linda and von Herder passed from room to room, and always the spring light followed them.

The ceilings seemed to topple down upon them, so massive were their carvings. Great knobs and pineapples of solid cembra, huge cherubs carved in a gnarled chestnut-wood, splendid squares and mountainous circles, all worked by hands long dead—worked, perhaps, in a Milanese workshop over a busy street, and brought in carts by sleepy oxen to this distant Alpine villa, to be put in place by the heavy fingers of some Graubünden carpenter.

They passed through the state bedrooms and the bedrooms of serving-maids, and they came at last to a little bedroom all by itself on a hidden stair. The room, though rather dark and smaller than the rest, was more perfectly finished in all its parts than any of the others. Its walls were panelled with a sombre wood, sombre were the exquisite doors and ceiling and all the little window-ledges; they were carved with quite a different and more exquisite art than that of the ones below. Everything in this room suggested sleep. The bed stood on a wooden dais, with

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gentle steps leading from the floor. It was hung with a grey-green damask which made one think of myrtle-woods in winter, and it was spread with a damask which seemed like the mosses on their stems. Let into the panel of the bed was the painted figure of a girl asleep beneath trees; exquisite were her supple limbs, the scarce-formed breasts, the lips parted in sleep. Garlands of oaken poppies encircled the bedposts, flopping their heavy heads with curious suggestions of dreams. At the foot of the bed was one high chair, deep-seated, as though perhaps an older person would sit there watching the sleeper on the bed. The window was barred with heavy iron grilles, and great steel locks crossed and re-crossed the doors.

A curious feeling of intrusion came over Linda, but so great was the fascination of this room that she could but stand there watching it. A thousand suggestions, a thousand hidden instincts surged to her heart—dim feelings of loves not sanctioned by God; dim forebodings of human passions leading to ultimate pain, but sweet, sweet, deadly sweet, while they lasted. She crept up the quiet steps to the bed; she touched the cover with her finger-tips; and as she did so she glanced above. The roof of the bed was made of cedar-wood, and was, unlike the rest of the woodwork, absolutely plain. Only in one little circle inlaid in the centre were written these words: "Thou and I"—"Tu ed io." Just over the words was the newly opened husk of a chrysalis, and a tortoise-shell butterfly had that moment emerged and was lazily closing and unclosing her heavy wings, preparing to fly away.

"Tu ed io." Linda started as though she had committed some treachery. Von Herder had left the room and was sitting in the great banquet hall astride of one of the large mosaic tables. He looked eager and interested, and had pushed his hands through his hair: "It's the key of the whole," he said, as she found him; "now I understand it. That's all—it's all there—it's as clear as the daylight."

"What?" said Linda.

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"Why, the room, of course—it's the reason, the heart of the whole of this curious place. Men don't build houses like this for nothing; they build them from some force of inspiration, from their passions—they build them for a woman, not for God; or to amaze a tiresome neighbour. This house was built by a rich man who had his home in Milan, and who fell in love with a girl—that thrilling little creature over the bed. He built this house, he planned every inch of its splendours, he made the Milanese work for all they were worth, and he made your peasants here work, too. He planned and he plotted and he made the thing, splendid and gorgeous in all its parts, and he brought her here—that strip of a girl."

Von Herder stopped. Linda had gone to the window and was looking out.

A curious shrivelled old gentleman with short white hair and an immense straw hat, and Berlin slippers on his feet, had come out into the sunlight with a bird-cage full of canaries, and was cleaning out their water-pans and peeling bits of groundsel for his pets. "That's the present owner," said von Herder. "Don't make yourself sick by watching anything as commonplace. We must talk to him later. . . . But one thing you didn't notice in the room, and that is the end of the history. Come back for a moment."

Half reluctantly Linda followed him. He led her round behind the door where there was a gap in the wall. A piece of the panel which had probably served as a secret door had lately fallen down, and behind it was a tiny altar. Within a small wooden frame was a most exquisite piece of embroidery representing the scourging of our Lord. The features of the face were agonized. Huge disproportionate drops of sweat and blood trickled down on the snow-white tunic. In the background stood His mother, weeping; and in this woman's face was a curious painful look. Her gown was sumptuous. It was evidently a portrait, possibly that of the girl's own mother.

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"The girl was an artist," said the Count, "the fact is apparent. She embroidered this thing in the days when her lover was away. He could not bear to leave her in Milan. He wanted her all to himself and alone. The portrait of Mary is her mother, the mother who missed her still, and she prayed to this Christ with her whole soul. It was the end of everything. It's the end of all great medieval passions, and of every modern one. You can't get away from it. It's the destruction of all merely worldly ideals. The Christian instinct is absolutely and finally destructive of human delights. . . . It's the old impossible story."

Linda went back to the bed. The tortoise-shell butterfly had taken flight, and was beating against the dusty glass on the window. The old ironwork tore at such a delicate fabric, and one of the wings was already cruelly mangled, the other covered with cobwebs. By a sudden chance it found its way to a pane whence the glass had fallen; and, wounded, but living, it fluttered out into the sunlight.

"Come, let us go," said von Herder, hurrying off, but Linda stayed an instant to put back the fallen panel.

"Thou and I," she repeated. Did she realize, even quite dimly, that the Christian acceptance of these words would eventually prove the stronger and the better? I cannot tell you. "Come, let us go"—that eternal refrain of our elders, impatient of the lingering queries of youth, which so disturbed them in their day, yet proved so fruitless of replies.

For an instant she lingered on. Now that the panel was shut on the image within, only the human and the pagan spirit of the room remained: "Thou and I"—the man and the girl.

Suddenly the sun had set, gone down behind the mighty crags of Castasegna. A curious chill, peculiar to spring, shot through the valleys, and quickly it passed, even through the windows of the villa, seeming to freeze the

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splendid décolletés of the ladies in the frescoes. Von Herder had hurried downstairs and was out on the terrace, talking quickly and irritably to the master of the house.

"So you continue to live in a house like this and to keep birds—feed canaries. Hens, even, would be more profitable!" he exclaimed with vehement rudeness.

"Excuse me," the old gentleman replied, "but you have dust on the sleeve of your coat. Permit me to brush you down. I am pleased to see you again in my poor house. You will notice that the breed is improved. You will observe that the cock bird, the grandson of the bird with which you had the kindness to present me some two years ago, bears plumage of a more tawny orange; his lower notes, too, are of a far fuller and more mellow quality. The hens, on the other hand——"

Linda approached. She listened with a sort of surprised repulsion to this talk of canaries from the owner of such a spot. What! with halls in which the very gods of the woods might come to sup, to live stuffed up in basement rooms, wearing Berlin slippers, talking of hen-canaries! The thing was preposterous.

"Young lady, I am honoured," the old gentleman said, perceiving her come. And his mild eyes, harmless as those of a child, but equally comprehending, surveyed her for an instant. "Ta, ra, ra. A little dance, a theatre, to drive in. a pretty carriage—carnations, roses for the evening gown. Most girls like things like these best." He looked at her shrewdly, then paused. "My hospitality can be but poor. The maid is sowing our summer seeds . . . But come indoors and see my home."

"No," said von Herder shortly. "We must go into the garden and then start home ourselves."

"Indeed, I want to see this gentleman's rooms," said Linda.

The old gentleman carefully dusted the big cage with the canaries, using a large white handkerchief of spotless cleanliness for his purpose. Then he lifted the cage and pre-

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ceded her into the house. They entered by a side-door through a small square of garden, very neat and full of commonplace evergreens and preparation for summer bedding. A room, which must formerly have been a sort of antechamber for servants and stray guests, was now adapted to the needs of the master of the house. It was dark and stuffy; a peculiarly ugly paper of a beetly brown colour, with small heraldic lions scattered upon its surface, covered what evidently were wooden panels. Several large photographs of quite uninteresting middle-class men and women, framed in those peculiar shining black oval frames which tell us that the photographs are enlarged and the persons represented have been thus enshrined after death, hung on the walls. A huge chromo-lithograph of Pope Leo—smiling, keen, and impenetrable, as he has smiled in every Catholic home for years—and others of Victor Emanuel, Queen Margareta clad in a glory of pearls, and some old prints and ugly lithographs, filled up odd spaces. A little iron stove, with a big rusty pipe extending far into the room before it proceeded to the ceiling, stood in the centre of the once splendid granite hearth. Everything which was grand and sumptuous had been dwarfed and vulgarized. Yet there was nothing mean about the appearance of the old gentleman, and he bore an expression of placid benevolence which the most critical could not resent. As he put down his bird-cage in the window, he spoke lovingly to its occupants, and they answered him back with chirps and calls of pleasure.

"Ah, Carachuna—Carachuna," he murmured. "Did they take thee out into the chill spring evening air? Didst thou ruffle out thy little feathers, heart of my heart, sweet of my eyes! Ah, little Carachuna, wilt take from my lips this piece of thy loved hemp—see, it is here—thy master gives it thee." The canary came sidling up to the bars of the cage, took the hemp and gobbled it up. Then drawing himself to his full height, till the bones on his thin breast stood out through the tightened feathers, he broke

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into a shrieking, thrilling song which pierced the stuffy, dingy room like a little sword. He shrieked, he sang, he screamed, and all the other birds in all the cages began to sing against him till the noise seemed well-nigh deafening.

"Ah! hear him, hear him!" cried the old gentleman, and rapturously he clapped his hands together. "Hear him! my golden bird, my heart of fire! See, he is singing—he sings for me! They are all singing. What a feast!"

The maid had come in from the kitchen bearing a beautiful copper bowl full of red-hot cinders. She reached a metal spoon from over the mantelpiece, and, giving the coals to Linda, began to stir them for her. Mechanically Linda took the scaldino. The shadows of the spring evening following the long hot day had chilled her. There were no dreams in this ugly little modernized room, yet there seemed to be delights almost as passionate as those of the myrtle bed above.

What did it all mean? The old gentleman, wrapt in the screaming songs of his unimaginative birds, had apparently quite forgotten her existence; her memory ran back to the splendid rooms above—the great mosaic table, where alabaster, porphyry, stalagmite, and gold-threaded lapis lazuli, lay inlaid in sumptuous squares and arabesques, and where the ceilings were weighted with garlands of fruits, and the warriors and ladies stood painted on the walls. And then the hidden bedroom—the grey-green damask hangings, the bed, the chair with the deep-cushioned seat, the picture of the girl asleep below the lemon-trees. . . .

And then the result of it all—the result as far as the human side was concerned (for he was a descendant of those exquisite Milanese lovers)—this little old man in the dull black coat, sitting under chromo-lithographs, enamoured of a canary.

"Come, let us go," cried von Herder outside the window. Linda got up. Her host smiled faintly, but he did not move to let her out.

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"Hush!" he said, "for it is not every day he sings with this extraordinary sweetness."

In the garden the shadows had been diluted by sudden reflections of sunset in the sky, and the whole air seemed gilded for the few more moments which heralded the twilight. They passed under an archway into the long-disused flower-garden or pleasaunce. First they came into one great court where there had once been deep tanks full of water, but the pipes which supplied these had probably long been ruined by Alpine winters, and only the empty cemented basins, flanked with marble seats and balustrades, remained. Their crevices were full of ferns, and here and there a fig-tree sprang towards the light from far below; the reflected glow of the sunset lingered on these marble ledges, making them seem frail and quite transparent.

"The tanks, of course, were full of fish," said von Herder, "and the lady could come to feed them, throw them crumbs, tease them with flowers. On hot summer nights she would bathe here, whiter than the marble itself in the moonlight. That was before the days of the embroidery. She embroidered after the baby came. Babies alter the whole situation—that is to say, if the mother is worth her salt, and most of them are—more is the pity for art and for lovers."

There was a gate in the wall of the first courtyard, of beautiful wrought ironwork. One half of it had fallen down and lay smothered in last year's leaves. Through it they passed to the pleasure-garden. The southern wall was flanked by the long line of the orangery, and the oranges and lemons—old, old trees, clinging to life by the simple force of existence—stood under a decaying cover of thatch. They stood in splendid copper urns with heavy handles. Time and weather had long since effaced all trace of the original metal, and a deep emerald crust embossed the exquisite line of their surface. All the glow of the sunset had centred in a deep belt across the western sky, and was

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framed and concentrated in the great crag walls of the Val Bregaglia. The ruddy light shone full on the green vases, on the hedge of withered hydrangeas, and lastly on the little cupid upholding the sundial in the centre of the box-lined labyrinth. The place seemed dead, deader even than the rooms in the villa beyond, and that inexpressible melancholy which haunts a disused garden—a melancholy far more profound than that pervading a ruined house or church—fell upon Linda's soul.

"Once again—let us be gone," said von Herder. But Linda sat down on the bench by the wall. She had something to say; von Herder was, perhaps, not precisely the person to whom to say it, but youth has no choice, and scant discernment, and even a world-worn man is probably a more sagacious counsellor than a sentimental woman friend. Also, when our emotions first blaze up in life it is possible that austere suppression, such as that of a maiden aunt, or even of a frightened mother, may serve as a further stimulant rather than as a check, by contrast. And so there is something to be said for the more brutal survey of a worldly man.

"You know nothing of who lived in this house," she blurted out. "The young woman you have talked so much about, and the man, and the whole story—it is only, after all, your invention. And people could live here, in a place like this, and be happy and yet be ideal and also homely. One needn't be dull like the old man, and keep canaries; one might—one might marry and live here, and be good to the peasants. . . ." Child as she was she checked herself. She felt she was uttering platitudes and quite inconsequent phrases.

"Good to the peasants—ideal—marry! Separate every one of those words from the very outset, if you have the smallest hope of starting square with existence——" Von Herder broke out harshly. "What did I tell you about the picture in the panel? Well! The show isn't finished yet—you have still to see the chapel."

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Linda stood up. She was facing the concentrated light of the sunset. It played in her eyes and defined the rounded, subtle lines of her figure. There was a curious sadness in her eyes, and yet they asked questions. In later life sad eyes are usually unexpectant.

"I think," she said, speaking half to herself, "that things can and *will* be right *at last*, although they seem not possible at the minute. I expect that perhaps the old gentleman with the canaries is right—I think that if one loves very much—if someone loves one very much. . . ."

Looking so remotely into the south, into the seething light which hid from her vision the lines of the plain and of Italy, a sudden curious and painful memory flashed to her brain. She was out in the snow-swept streets at Trins, and the heavy touch of a peasant seemed suddenly to settle on her fingers, whilst a baby wailed in the house beyond. She started almost in anguish, for her mind was aflame to new impressions.

"Well," she said, "what of the chapel?"

Count von Herder pushed through some bushes and weeds to a hidden door in the northern wall, and they stood facing the steps of a small chapel. At that moment a bell began to ring, a shrill, discordant bell with a sort of tinkle in the back of it. The chapel was built at a bad period, later than the villa; it had a great deal of over-ornate decoration—shells and florid scrolls above the arches of the windows, and ugly cupids upholding the initials of Christ on the entrance door. Two small candles were lighted on the altar, and a priest had just come in and was hurrying into his white cassock. The expression of his face was lowering and unpleasant; he began to repeat the benediction in a quick irreverent voice, and as he did so his eyes wandered round the chapel and lighted on the figures of the strangers. Then he hurried less and began to enunciate with a sort of animal guttural sound. Two or three women straggled in, one, who was only a child herself, with a baby at her breast; another drew long sobbing breaths as though she had come

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away from some late anguished parting; the others were old, and seemed to be praying incessantly, out of a sort of habit rather than a hope. In a corner of the chapel was a huge crucifix with a great figure of Christ carved in wood and crudely painted; it was the figure of a crying human agony. There was no hope in it—only the consolation of a despair greater perhaps than that in the hearts of a peasant congregation, who brought to it their own great burden of ignorance and woe.

"You see them," whispered von Herder; "these are the peasants you propose to console by living in painted halls and being yourself ideally happy."

Linda said nothing. There was nothing to be said. She felt, she even knew, that von Herder was wrong, that the priest was wrong, that the initials of Christ should never have been emblazoned amongst these many decorative scrolls. She glanced with a sort of hidden appeal to the young woman rocking her baby as she prayed. There was something real and right there, but it was not final, and also the woman looked anxious and sad, and only the baby was at peace, because sleeping. Then suddenly a fleeting vision of an English Sunday came before her. She saw the entire neatness of the pews, the peaceable prosperity of her uncle's tenants, their wives and their children. She smelt the smell of the carefully kept hassocks, she noted the soullessness of the faces in the stained-glass windows, the exquisite order of the altar, the polish on the brass, the well-being which amounted to apathy in the entire place and its congregation. But that was wrong, too, and a thousand times worse. For did not Christ say that he loved the tattered raiment, and the agony of the human heart? Where then was God? And where did He enter? What was His Home? Not up there at the villa, perhaps; not down here in this ill-constructed chapel; certainly not amongst the English hassocks. . . .

Linda started from her reverie, von Herder was already making for the door. He pushed aside the great leathern

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curtain, waiting for Linda to follow him, but she paused and he went without her. Linda went back quietly, pushed by some prehistoric instinct for devotion, for she was in no sense in a praying mood; she went into one of the pews, and kneeling down, she closed her eyes. At that moment the organ suddenly commenced in a low, minor key. A different player had entered the scene. Von Herder was essentially an artist, and from the now crazy pipes and pedals of what had once been a good instrument he could draw forth an extraordinary volume of weird and capricious harmonies. Suddenly, leaving the wailing minor key in which he had commenced, he broke into an impassioned rhapsody of chords, which shook the dust from the florid angels and set the tinsel roses shaking on the altar. The women rose from their knees; an odd light, first of expectation, then of exaltation, came into their faces; the child woke and gave a sort of crowing call. A queer smile crept round the lips of the priest, as, with hands folded on his breast, he went down the steps and entered the vestry.

The music died out as suddenly as it had begun, and twilight and silence fell back on the chapel. Linda got up, and, a little mystified, went to the door. Von Herder came hurrying down from the organ loft to meet her. "Well," he said, "*that* was more like it—wasn't it?"

"More like what?"

"More like what, after all, most people are looking for."

"I don't know what you mean," said Linda.

"We are all looking for emotions—every man and woman and child of us," said von Herder. "Even the child was pleased—did you hear it?"

"The music woke it," said Linda, "and so of course it cried."

"It heard what it was going to listen to, for the rest of its poor little mortal life," said von Herder. "It did not understand—but nevertheless it heard, and responded As for the women and the priest. . . ."

"The women looked happier," said Linda.

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"They were happier, because they were deluded. Emotions are merely delusions. But they are more real than other ones—— Religion is, after all, merely a museum where some of the greatest of human delusions are stored."

"I believe you are wrong," said Linda almost sternly, and half to herself too.

"Well," said von Herder, looking at her for a moment straight and full, and with something of painful and earnest scrutiny, "you will soon be able to learn for yourself. For the moment you are not awake, you are only learning to wake up, almost like the baby—and the supper," he added in the same breath, "will be growing cold at Chiavenna."

"Yes—all the same you are *wrong*," said Linda, and they walked in silence down the path and back to the valley-road.

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CHAPTER XVII

VENICE

It was a cold wet night when they reached Venice. The wind came tearing in stormy gusts over the lagoon and up through the streets, lashing the water in the narrow channels, catching the shawls of the girls as they hurried across the bridges. The sky above, the water beneath, the doors leading to the houses—all were huddled in a sort of inky mystery. There was no colour anywhere, and nothing to mark the sense of glory connected with the very name of Venice. Linda knew very little of Venice—and very little, too, of her actual history; but in her English home she had seen many prints, and copies of pictures and photographs, which showed her seas and saints, houses, skies and boats, bathed in an orange glow. This black night showed her nothing but a certain grim and stony city, built long years ago by man for man's abode.

Dr. Caflisch had business to attend to in Venice, where he had inherited a certain amount of property. On his rare visits he always stayed with his cousins the Castelbergs of Ilanz. Herr Castelberg had started his own business career more than thirty years ago in a Venetian back-street with a little pastry-cook's shop. Step by step he had improved his business, and he was now the most conspicuous confectioner in northern Italy. He had a splendid restaurant on the Piazza of St. Mark, where every self-respecting tourist tried to secure a little tin table on Sunday afternoons when the band was playing, and where a curious medley of Italians and other nationalities sipped ice-cream and drank their benedictines and rosoglios between four

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of the clock and midnight. Added to this, he drove a flourishing wine business in one of the back-streets, and had several branch connections in Padua and Verona. He was a substantial, wealthy man, respected and perhaps a little feared, by the alien people amongst whom he lived.

But his wealth and his position had done nothing to alter the inner man. He remained a mountaineer; and his heart clave to the grey crags and the wooden barns above his home. At the age of thirty-five he returned to this home, and there he sought out the woman of whom, as a boy, leaving home, he had made a mental note for his future bride, and whom he had left walking with her books to school, her two long pig-tails tightly plaited and falling over the leathern apron at her back.

Walpurga had grown tall and full in figure. Certain passages there had been in her life of which, perhaps, her husband never knew, but of which another in this story was quite conscious. These had left her just a little cold. But the two were married happily, and he brought her back to live with him in Venice. Had Walpurga Castelberg lived all her life in the home of her birth, she would most probably have grown like her sister, the Emperor's wife, at Trins—worn and hard-featured before her prime. As it was, the southern climate and easy indoor life had ripened her beauty like that of some fine nectarine upon a sheltered wall. She was now a magnificent type of womanhood, deep-bosomed, and majestic both in face and figure. Her skin, which was of a very pale olive, had occasionally a ruddy glow; her quite black hair, parted in the middle, was plaited in a crown above her well-formed brows. She walked and spoke with a slow, almost a dragging intonation; her small hands were very white, and she wore a curious Venetian ring with a Moor's head carved in onyx on her finger. Round her neck hung a heavy golden chain, bought at a Florentine sale, of curious and splendid workmanship; this and the ring and the crown of hair were the only adornment of this most noble looking woman.

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Walpurga was very representative of nationality, and of the curious influences of environment on a strong, enduring character. The inner being remained unchanged, but the outward form had gained and had been glorified by the southern surroundings.

In spite of the adverse Venetian climate, Frau Castelberg had succeeded in tending a number of fine carnations. These flowers were her pride, and she kept them in big wooden tubs, just as her own mother had kept them before her on the wooden balcony at Ilanz. Walpurga was a Roman Catholic, and was usually to be seen kneeling at early Mass by the steps of a side-altar in the Frari Church. When her morning's work was done she would take her sewing—usually some household linen, or one of the grey woollen dresses which she always made herself—and she would sit in one of the windows of the great palace, which commanded a view of the little arched bridge over which the people passed and repassed one another, and away to the little piazza, where all the play, and much of the business, the scandal, and the love-making of the district concentrated. Here, in this seat, the beautiful woman had gathered the materials for what philosophy of life she had—and it was profound—within her calm, reflective brain. Once, long ago, she had had some illusions, but they were now eclipsed. She loved her husband, but she was much alone. No children had ever come in the years of their married life to climb upon the broad, strong knees which would so well have sheltered them. Friends she had few, lovers she disdained. It was something of a prison life, but her thoughts were free, and they, I know, had travelled far.

Their house stood in a side canal at the back of the Frari. It was a splendid building, though rather crowded and obscured by meaner dwellings. The Castelbergs only inhabited the mezzanino of this palace. The piano nobile was kept spotlessly clean, its rooms were opened only occasionally for their rare visitors. The best of these rooms had been opened to-night for Linda. It was a spacious room; the

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floor was paved with scagliola and very slippery; sumptuous lemon-coloured curtains made of an ancient damask covered the windows, the seats of the high-backed chairs, the sofas, and the footstools; full-length mirrors, with great gilded frames, were let into the walls, and being very old, the glass within them had acquired ghost-like shadows and strange green lights which seemed to reflect the lagoon. In the centre of the floor was a long table with a huge slab of Russian malachite let into the top of it, and gilded lions to serve as legs. But Frau Castelberg, who was strangely uninfluenced by upholstery, had set her own seal upon the table in the form of a little woollen mat, with a tumbler full inside of rosemary and carnations.

The shutters were shut, the scattered candles only gave sufficient light for the suggestion of further mysteries in the vast apartment.

Linda was dazed and exhausted as she stumbled out of the gondola, and up the steps, and into the cavernous halls of this, her first Venetian palace. Sounds which seemed but a series of discords jarred on ears prepared for melody. The screaming voices of the gondoliers as they lashed their boat to the *palle*, and began at once to dismantle it of all its furniture for the night, seemed to her exaggerated and unnecessary. Outside, the wind had screamed through the canal; but within the huge stone halls there was a sort of stillness like that of some dead spirit, which greatly oppressed her. Then a door opened of itself, as it seemed, in the floor above, and Frau Castelberg appeared in the shaft of the lamplight.

Linda had always been half afraid of Frau Castelberg; she had never dared, even as a little thing, to cling about her skirts, and she was, perhaps unjustifiably, conscious of a certain disdain in the eyes of the impassive, far-seeing woman. Yet—or perhaps just because of this—she adored her, and to-night, wearied with a host of curious new impressions, she turned with a sort of frightened reverence to the quiet presence.

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Frau Castelberg took her hand and looked into her face. "Linda grows tall," she said to her husband, "but I think she is overtired." She led her into her bedroom: "See," she said, "I have picked you a couple of Bündner flowers to make you feel at home here."

Linda was taking off her hat, and Frau Castelberg could not see how doubtful was the happiness produced by her gift of memory.

"What a room, Cousin Walpurga! What a splendid, splendid room!" said Linda. "I would like to look out of the window."

"It is stormy and damp," said Walpurga. But she went to one of the windows, pushed back the curtains, and began to unfasten the bolts. Linda then saw that there were six tall windows to her room, and that she was about to inhabit one of those many beautiful apartments with its line of pointed Gothic traceries and its balcony guarded by little white lions which the old builders made for all the good Venetian palaces. She stepped out on to the balcony; the clouds had parted; a clear moon, white and dazzling, cast its pure radiance over the fantastic scene.

Immediately opposite her balcony, and only separated by a narrow canal, was a small piazza leading to one of those many unfinished brick church-fronts familiar to everyone in Italy—vast spiritual designs where the flesh had proved too weak. A little to the right stood the campanile, its bells standing out distinct against the sky of night. To left and right again, houses—gaunt stone fronts with heavy wooden shutters, fronts which suggested barely anything of the inner life they sheltered, and all surmounted by a marvellous jumble of chimney-stacks and brown and purple roofs.

A bridge, just below the balcony, joined the walls of Frau Castelberg's palace to the other houses of the piazza. A man and a girl were leaning over the parapet of the bridge, the girl huddled in her saffron shawl, the man in his mantle. They talked together in low crooning voices, but otherwise

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there was little sign of life, for Venetians hate the cold, and for them the spring had scarcely dawned.

"Do you hear the music?" said Frau Castelberg.

Far away, from the direction of the Grand Canal, came a sweet, half plaintive melody of violins and voices, rising and falling with the swaying of the waves. Linda listened intently and her spirits rose once more.

"Oh! it is lovely!" she said.

But Frau Castelberg shrugged her shoulders and gathered her shawl about her.

"They are only singing for the tourists," she said. "They are all paid singers—higher paid at this time, for they hate to sing in the open these cold nights; but the tourists expect it, because they come to Venice largely in order to hear serenades. A great proportion of them are brides and bridegrooms—people with money, of course. They are either in love with themselves or with love—sometimes, perhaps, with one another. It comes very much to the same—and when one is in love, colds and fever do not count, though a certain number die of it every season. They call it the Italian fever when they get home, whereas it was only rashness and folly—— Let us go in."

But Linda lingered on the balcony. Frau Castelberg's words were unpleasant to her ear; had Count von Herder said these things—and strangely enough they were such as von Herder might well have said—she would have treated them half as a jest. Coming from this majestic woman, it was necessary to accept them as serious; they were therefore doubly distasteful.

Just at this moment a gondola came silently up the canal below her. It was uncovered; the two gondoliers, dressed in a rather extravagant style, which any true Venetian would have scorned, seemed scarcely to move their oars, yet the boat was flying. An English man and girl were sitting on the cushioned seat. The girl was typical of well-bred England—well-groomed, well-trained, like the thoroughbred mares in her father's stables. Her heavy sables had

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dropped a little from her shoulders, and the moonlight caught the opal and diamond pendant on her throat. Her hair was gathered back from her forehead and twisted into a glossy coil upon her neck. The man wore no hat. His coat was flung open and showed his evening dress. His short hair, crisp and curly, was cropped very close to his head. He had a small moustache, which he pulled as he watched the girl beside him.

"Ripping?" he suggested. Short and ugly as was the word, it was spoken with smothered emotion.

"Rather!" answered the girl.

The gondola shot under the shade of the bridge.

A feeling—was it akin to envy?—ran to Linda's heart; but Frau Castelberg had turned and was quietly drawing her back to the room.

"A bride and a bridegroom," she said in her curious dragging voice—"and likely to catch a fever. Let us come down to supper."

Supper was spread in a small room at the back of the house on the ground floor, which overlooked the garden. A large dish of fried eggs, a bowl of soup, some Bologna sausages, and a loaf of bread, stood on the table; some bottles of very old wine, and a silver basket with exquisite cakes and pastry, were on the sideboard.

"Oh! Walpurga is a thorough Bündnerin," said her husband. "We might have been living in Ilanz all our days."

"Good!" said Dr. Caflisch, and drew up his chair to the table.

But Linda sat listlessly down. In a pause of the meal she listened, and she heard far away the faint, clear sound of voices and of violins, and she saw in her thoughts a gondola under the bridge. People—young people—were out on the water in boats; and here sat this woman, more beautiful than any of them, quietly eating her evening soup and sausages, whilst she herself—Linda—with

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thoughts and questions seething in her heart in thousands, thoughts enough to turn the whole world young again, must follow the same routine. She joined the talk, but she queried the minds of the speakers.

"Have you seen my brother, Sebastian?" said the doctor at last. "He should be here in Venice now."

"Yes," said Walpurga. "He's been here a week; he was here this morning, asking for Linda. He said he would come again to-night. I told him it was safer for him indoors these cold spring nights, but he does not listen. He neglects himself and commits all follies. He has taken rooms on the Riva, and the Venetians cheat him right and left; but he's a good man. I wish he would lead a less hazardous life."

A knock sounded at this moment on the door, a sort of impetuous hammering.

"El Signor—el Signor!" screamed a raucous voice, and when the door was opened a superb man stood on the threshold. It was Sebastian's Italian servant, Giovanni, and he had no intention of allowing either himself or his master to creep in unannounced. Sebastian entered, smiling, made a profound bow to his hostess, and gaily took a place at the table, whilst Giovanni drew himself up, as an uninvited sentinel, behind his chair.

Sebastian looked pale and thin and haggard; life here delighted, but did not agree with him. An almost ecstatic smile lit up his face as one by one he observed the people and the objects round about him.

"What a perfect table!" he exclaimed to his hostess. "It is like Graubünden and Tiepolo rolled in a ball together."

Then Linda, who had so grudgingly noted the homely food in contrast to the palatial hall, felt suddenly at peace with her surroundings. Sebastian had "a way with him"; with all his passionate love of art, he could humanize social intercourse. Class was nothing to Sebastian; he loved a peasant just as he loved an aristocrat. Pretensions were

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what he abhorred, and every form of insincerity. Over and through the trammels of civilized persons he, who was himself so deeply civilized, tripped lightly to and fro. He saw and he noted what others perhaps saw but did not notice. What puzzled Linda had long been outlived by her uncle, in whose frail and battered body little of the mere animal man was left. The spirit was paramount—by that he was guided. He was no saint, but it was impossible for him to be a great sinner. By people in backwaters he might have been considered a rather unsuitable mentor for developing womanhood, but taken all round he was most curiously suited for this post. Linda's heart leapt to his encounter. Her blood, which had been seeking new channels and was almost going astray, seemed suddenly to concentrate; and as the evening wore away she became the wildest of the group in that old Venetian palace.

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CHAPTER XVIII

"SEHNSUCHT"

SEBASTIAN had rooms on a side canal by the corner of the Giudecca, and here he had gathered about him as servants a large part of the family of his gondolier. These people adored him and served him with willingness, for Sebastian entered with love, and an almost minute accuracy, into the lives of the people about him, and the lives of the Venetians made special appeal to him.

Sebastian had brought a large book-box from England. Its contents lay stacked on the floor in his sitting-room. He never bought bric-à-brac, but one exquisite and perfectly genuine bronze—that of a small faun—stood on the table, and served as a letter-weight to his manuscripts. He wrote a good deal, but rarely published. He was always attempting to tear out the heart of things, apart from their fictional attractiveness. For the moment he desired to know how it could have come about that the spirit of Art, which once had been the very heart of the Republic, should so totally have died and given place to a sort of indifferent materialism in the present inhabitants. Sebastian was in advance of his times, for this spirit of research is better understood nowadays. He was one who unconsciously explored, and it was a matter of the most supreme indifference to him what the world thought of his investigations. He occasionally, almost in a spirit of fantastic antagonism, hurled a pamphlet amongst the professors of Art; but his investigations and conclusion were for the most part kept to himself, and to a circle of curious friends. Art interested,

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often delighted, but never sufficed him. His Italian wanderings—and they were many—revealed a million sidelights on the human situation, such as the ordinary artistic traveller of that period ignored.

No guide more fascinating, and perhaps more fundamentally instructive, could have been discovered for an intuitive character such as Linda's during its first artistic pilgrimage; and Sebastian was fully prepared to put his knowledge at her feet, for he loved his attractive niece, and studied her development with joyous interest. Stuffed himself with that most doubtful blessing, "Culture," Sebastian was careful not to put it before his own pupils as a creed. Indeed, his doctrines were perhaps always a little paradoxical and bewildering to the young mind, which has ever a hankering for plain sailing; but a prig he could never breed, or be in any way responsible for.

Linda would spend whole mornings in the Scuola di S. Rocco, imbibing no mean knowledge of the majestic and tragic canvases which hang upon its walls, but her admiration was wrung from her only after a series of harsh and curious criticisms. All through her after life she held as the most perfect conception of the Christ that solitary figure standing white, and totally at war with the pomps of life with which the artist so loved to crown his every other conception. It held for her all of the Christian ideal—and just the more so because it alone of all the Venetian pictures really did hold this spirit in her eyes. The pictures in the Accademia troubled her. She could not fathom her own feelings, but it was a sense of general irreverence and unfitness which repelled her in all picture galleries. The fantastic fairy tales of Carpaccio, which purport to represent passages in the lives of saints, never got much hold of her. Her soul was seeking for Ideals, and the golden hair and exposed bosoms of the ladies, and all the gewgaws which surrounded them, rang false upon her sentiment.

Quite dimly, perhaps, she felt that all this splendour, all

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this art, this craving of master minds for surface beauty and perfection, was only a phase—a glorious phase, perhaps, but one which had long since died.

Had her Venetian visit been wholly lived between the house of her cousin Walpurga and that of her uncle, Linda might have emerged from it with nothing but good, for after all, a knowledge of what is really beautiful to the eye must be some sort of gain, if not the highest, in youth. But another element was added to it. Count von Herder appeared upon the scene, and was soon on intimate terms with Sebastian. Von Herder could be deeply and powerfully interesting to men as well as to women. His nervous vitality was refreshing to Sebastian, his eccentric and capricious habits suited those of the more fastidious Englishman; and Sebastian inquired of no man for his past, neither was he himself affected by the moral tenets of his companions. He had a pretty shrewd notion of what was fitting for young women, and he more or less guarded Linda; but still, she was often thrown with von Herder, whose cynical views necessarily affected, somewhat for evil and anyhow as a saddening process, her quite untutored vision of reality. But her moral and spiritual nature were too strong for any surface sullying.

Doctor Caflisch, having finished his business, a little reluctantly consented to leave his daughter for a few weeks longer in Venice. He himself was forced to return to his practice at Trins; but he had a high esteem for Walpurga and her household; he was fond of Sebastian, and things seemed on the whole to promise not unsatisfactorily for his child's happiness and improvement. The Swiss easily confide their sons and daughters to foreign homes; it may be said that the mercenary element has never become extinguished, and he did not perhaps sufficiently calculate the powers of environment on the child of his mixed marriage. Linda was passing through a period of great emotional stress, and Walpurga, powerful as was her personality, was not perhaps the best woman to help her. Still, probably,

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sooner or later, the elements of difficulty must have been disclosed.

Walpurga seemed always to sit alone, and to be perpetually not only in physical health, but at peace. She did none of the things which most people consider necessary to the health of the body. She took practically no exercise. On Sunday she went to early vespers in the Frari Church, which was but thirty paces from her own back-door, and in the afternoon, if the season were settled, and fine and warm, she and her husband would very occasionally take a steamer to the Lido, and drink their coffee at a little trattoria, near the landing-place. Walpurga was over forty, yet she seemed to be at once at the beginning, and at the end, of human experience. Walpurga was precisely everything Linda was not, and never could be. Linda adored her, with a curious, almost strained adoration, and the elder woman returned the affection with a calm, undemonstrative, yet pervading interest rather than with any sentiment as warm as love.

"Why do you perpetually refer yourself to your cousin Walpurga," von Herder exclaimed irritably, as they sat together in Sebastian's sitting-room. "She's just a log—a handsome one, I grant you, but a log."

"How can you say such a thing?" fired up Linda, "when you know very well she is nearer the gods. And you——?"

"Well—I?" inquired von Herder, who always thirsted for contest.

Sebastian was reading in the window.

"On Mount Vesuvius in April," he said, "thousands of blue larkspurs flourish, together with millions of the fairest flowers, and there is no wine better than that which comes from the vintage of the dead lava fields."

Two days later Linda was sitting with her cousin waiting for Sebastian to fetch her for a row. A boat drew up at the landing, and Walpurga looked out of the window. "It is

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Count von Herder," she said rather coldly, coming back into the room. "I have told him to wait. He says he is come to fetch you for a row."

"I know," said the girl, without any show of interest.

There was a curious quiet light in Frau Castelberg's eyes. She bent for a moment over her sewing; then she looked up, and her great eyes, like the quiet pools in a tempestuous mountain torrent, lighted for a moment full into Linda's soul.

"Linda," she said, "Count von Herder is no good man." She paused. "Your Uncle Sebastian is not always wise in his manner of life, but he is a very good man."

"I know," said Linda, "but what does it matter? What harm can Count von Herder do to me? It all depends on oneself, after all. I am happy or unhappy, but it is no one else's fault. And then, what you call 'bad' people are, after all, very amusing."

"You are saying nothing which is in the least new," said Walpurga. "When you are old and wise, or sad, perhaps, you may even say exactly the same, but now is not the time. Bad people have this much harm in them—they take all, and they give one nothing back. Good people make one sad—even dull at the time; but afterwards one remembers—one has gathered in strength like the harvest from good seed."

"And you," said Linda, facing suddenly round, "you seem to know neither the good *nor* the bad. You sit here sewing these dull grey gowns, you are so much more wonderful than any other woman. Oh! You are splendid to look at; but you should dress in white satin, with one great emerald necklace! Indeed you should, Cousin Walpurga. Instead, you just let life go by—it just goes by you like a stream—you are only watching it all the time. I know it's good of you, and perhaps better, and all that, but I—I want to live it."

"No one 'lives' it in the sense you imagine," said Wal-

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purga. "That is the point. You either play at living it, or you watch it, or you *do* actually live it. The people who live it are the people whom you call 'dull.' But it takes a lifetime to find this out."

A loud knock came at the door, and Count von Herder, without further ceremony, came into the room. It was a hot Italian afternoon, but he wore his thick hunting coat, and his big brown boots. He looked tired and distraught.

"Are you coming, or not?" he said. And, sitting down with his hands clasped between his knees, he leaned forward, looking first at Walpurga and then at Linda. His eyes were restless and bloodshot, his whole manner feverish and dissatisfied.

"Is she to come, or is she not?" he said again, rather rudely.

"Linda is her own mistress," Frau Castelberg replied. She had taken up her sewing again.

"Oh, we know what that means," said von Herder. "It's such a hackneyed covering of disapproval. Come along, Linda." Then he stood up. "Frau Castelberg—we understand one another. We have been through the same mill, but are come out at different ends of the wheel." Then hurriedly, and in a lower voice: "The child's a child, and will remain one. She will probably be an unhappy child—but virtuous she is, and virtuous she will remain. . . . Is it not so?"

Frau Castelberg said nothing, and Linda got up and went to the window. She had heard her uncle's voice down in the canal, and called to him delightedly; then she faced round.

"See, Cousin Walpurga! Now it will be all right to go, for Uncle Sebastian is here."

"With your uncle things are right," said Walpurga, and soon Linda went to put on her hat. When she came back she found that von Herder and her cousin were talking together in rather excited voices. Walpurga's eternal sew-

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ing was laid aside; she had stood up, and was pressing her small firm finger tips on the cold marble of the centre table. Her figure seemed to have shrunk a little. Her usually impassive features were curiously strained, and her large eyes full of an unwonted fire.

"I have said—I have spoken," she repeated, "and the thing belongs to the past; it is finished—done. I only think for others." She faced round. Linda stood in the doorway, turning to leave a scene where she felt herself to be but an intruder.

"Come in, Linda, let me look at you." Almost impetuously Walpurga drew the girl to her, took off her hat, pushed back her hair, and gazed into her eyes. Then the unwonted fire of her action seemed to die out; and almost mournfully she let her go.

"Yes," she said, half to herself, and as though dreaming. "There is not the depth. There is not so far to fall. To suffer—yes—— Go, Linda, to your uncle, and may God keep you."

Von Herder was silent for an unusually long period after they were settled in the boat, and indeed, not till they were well out of the town and away on the lagoon, did he begin to speak. Sebastian, unconscious of the preceding scene, had established himself in the prow with a book, so Linda and von Herder were thrown together, and she herself had no wish to break the silence. At last, in his abrupt way, he began to speak:

"Child," he said, "she called you a child! You are not a child. You think you are—but you are past that age. Soon enough you will come to the other. Once I had a Greek dragoman. Whenever anything went wrong with him or me he said, 'We sorfer.' Something is about to go wrong with you—you will 'sorfer.' You need not mind me telling you this; it is best to be prepared."

Linda was draggling her hand in the warm water of the lagoon. The boat went swiftly over the ripples, the sun

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fell full in her eyes. She heard every word that von Herder said, but she did not answer; she heard it as one hears a tale in dreams.

"Have you walked through copses in autumn after the leaves are off the bushes?"

"I suppose so."

"And what did you see there?"

"The twigs against the sky, of course."

Von Herder kicked his feet almost angrily against the bottom of the boat.

"There were other things."

"What?"

"Skeletons of the past—birds'-nests—old nests, beautifully built nests, horrible nests because disused."

"Well?"

"The time comes to all of us when we realize our own lives, and those of the people round us, to be like those same nests."

Linda took her hand out of the water.

"The spring comes again, and covers them."

"Covers them!" von Herder laughed. "And when the spring goes they show again, and in another year the wind and the rain destroys them utterly. No bird builds again in the disused nests."

"I think I have always dreaded the spring," said Linda slowly, and almost unconsciously, and von Herder started from his seat.

"You are too young to speak like that; and as for me, I was only a fool to talk as I did to you. Forget every word I said to you. Think of me as a thing diseased, but be yourself; you are good and true, and you can't be otherwise. Go back to your mountains. Marry your peasant lover." Linda blushed angrily. "Oh, never mind. Be glad and proud that you have such a thing." He pushed his hand through his hair, his skin was hot and fevered. "There are certain birds—rooks they call them—which build year after year in the same nests. These birds never build in

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the wilderness; they live near men, they love the ways of men, they like the smoke of chimneys to come up round their trees in spring; they caw the louder because the children of men are tumbling in the dust around their roots. You can still live like a rook—go back and do it."

"Linda!" cried Sebastian a little harshly from the bows, and Linda got up and went to her uncle. He did not speak to her, but she saw he was angry with someone or something. She sat down near him, and her chin went into her hands.

They went to the Lido and returned by the Giudecca. Linda was only just eighteen; she felt suddenly old and sad, and out of the race of life. She went very slowly up to her room. The halls of the palace which had charmed her so intensely seemed for that moment to have grown dank and dreary. But her own big room was hot from the afternoon sunlight. The lilac was fading in the earthenware pots on the shelf, and the roses von Herder had given her were fallen in heaps of white and crimson petals to the floor. Linda stooped down and picked up the petals of the roses, and threw them into the canal. Then she threw away the lilac, too, and the room looked bare; she went to the table, and with a strange reluctance took up a parcel that had come to her by the post. It was a cardboard box, and when she opened it she found it full of mountain flowers. There were little woolly anemones which had battled their way into life through the bitter frosts of an Alpine spring—small bits of grey fluff, with big bright hearts of gold unseen inside them; and battered gentian cups, bluer than all the blue of the Adriatic; and here and there a primula and crocus. Linda spread them out upon the table and went to fetch fresh water. It was Sunday evening, and the bells in the Rosario began to clash and clang together, with a sort of passionate primitive call to prayer. Linda came back and looked at the flowers, and began to put them all in water, and, as she did so, she saw

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a girl in a pure white gown dancing on the deck of a steamer. They had passed her that evening as they came into Venice. She thought how that girl knew nothing of the little lowly flowers on the bare and almost barren Alps, and how she would not take them as a gift, but would wear in her breast that night some many-scented waxen flowers which her partner would get for her in some rare hot-house. The thought was indescribably painful to Linda. "No, no, no!" she said to herself, and she went to the window and knelt there, watching the people pass over the bridge. The bells clashed on. They clanged and battered from every campanile in Venice, and the swifts came out and swirled and yelled through the heated, cloudless air. The people went by to church—the girls had their pale yellow shawls thrown back off their heads, for the evening was still and warm. They chattered as they shuffled along. Now and then a young man walked beside them, chaffing them; now and then a woman and a man went by together, he bending towards her as he moved, for a thing which was love was between them. And Linda saw it; she knew very well when people loved; indeed, she began to look out for it. She acquired an extraordinary habit of seeing the fact of lovers—a wild and passionate sympathy for their joy and for their pain. And there were women with children in their arms and clinging to their skirts; for the facts of the pride of motherhood Linda acquired a miraculous insight—the insight, maybe, of envy, but the insight certainly of a profound, deep-seated longing.

Presently Sebastian's cook came by on the bridge. "Ah, Signorina," she called, "are you all alone?"

"Yes, I'm alone. Are you going to church, Maria?"

"Marry your peasant lover, live like a rook," she repeated to herself.

"It's the month of Mary—a beautiful service with music—every evening."

"I should like to go with you," said the girl. She put on her hat and ran down the stairs, and the mountain flowers withered in the hot Venetian night air.

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PART III

THE MAIDEN'S BLOOD

" Upon an evening in the month of May,
When from the heavens like a burning tear
The sun dropped down,
Then did the blood awaken in the veins
Of the young maiden wand'ring through the fields.
Then the blood cried to her,
And the blood burned in her,
And as it burned within her, thus it spake:
' What art thou making, maiden, of thy youth?
What wilt thou make of me?
I tire of this light tripping to and fro,
This idle running through thy strong young frame.
Now would I fain stand still and do my work,
And mark, when thou shalt see
This work of thine old flesh, thy blood renewed,
Then shalt thou thank the blood that gave thee this.'

" So the blood burned within her,
And thus it cried to her.
And there beside the maize field,
The other one was waiting,
He—the mysterious one.

" In the month of May, at even
The sun drops down from heaven
Heavily, like a tear."

From "The Bard of the Dimbovitza."

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CHAPTER XIX

THE MAIDEN'S BLOOD

THE heat of summer burst upon Venice very suddenly. It came with one of those swift, silent, burning waves which seal the fact of summer. For spring in Europe, as, indeed, probably everywhere else, is really not so much a season in itself as a battle of summer with the winter which went before it. And notably is this so in Italy, where the huge barriers of the Alps, with all their limitless snowfields, accentuate the sense of battle more than the coming of summer in our more northern but less mountainous country ever can do. But the sun had asserted his power at last even over the northern winds and snowfields, and with a sort of herculean splendour had pierced the lingering chills of winter, and had ridden triumphant into the plains and the cities of Italy. Venice lay panting and sparkling in the warm and radiant air.

"All the same I cannot stand it," said Sebastian, whose delicate fibres suffered from sudden changes of atmosphere. "Let us get away from all this fœtid glamour—these sweating tourists and their guides and gondolas. . . . Let us get to the hills and breathe again. Think, Linda dear, the flowers will all be out there now, away on the mountain-sides. Thousands of white acacias and fields full of poet's narcissi; and citus and thyme and pink fraxinella, up on the hillsides and down in the meadows."

Linda was standing by the table arranging the books she had been reading with Sebastian. Some words of Leopardi were singing in her brain. The orange sails of the

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trebacoli were scarcely moving by the churches of the Giudecca.

Sebastian's words did not attract her. "Going to the hills," she repeated. "But what hills should you want to go to, Uncle Sebastian?"

Linda was expanding in Venice. She inwardly dreaded a change or a check. She was at large, and drinking in, unconsciously, a host of strong impressions of mere beauty which would accompany her to her grave, and tinge with illusive halos the saddening cares of later life, and distract, by memory's vision, the woeful ways of illness and of death.

It was certainly a life of dreams in which for the moment this curious girl was living, and into it Sebastian's words fell like the rather sudden shock of waking; for it seemed that he expected her to go with him when he spoke of his own departure from Venice. He did not propose to go back to England, or to the Alps—he merely proposed to go to some hills where flowers were growing; there were not enough flowers in Venice for Sebastian. Linda liked changes, and she liked flowers, too, but this particular change distressed her—it roused her from what, perhaps, was her first passionate dream.

Linda asked no more about the hills; she put on her hat and she went down the street. How hot it was in the street. The women were fanning themselves with great paper fans, and all the wooden shutters, even in the poorer quarters, were closed. Linda came back to the Palazzo Molinaro. It was nearly midday, and a maid had closed the shutters. She had been washing the mosaic floors, and the rooms smelt fresh and cool in the semi-darkness. Only through chinks in the back of the house did the sun succeed in piercing, here and there, and with the sunlight came a heavy and a heavenly scent—that of the wistaria flowers. Linda went straight to the back of the house, which looked over the quiet garden where the pine-tree grew. She put her hand out of the window, and pulled up a long heavy spray of the wistaria, which always stirred her senses more

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than any other flower. How warm, how pungently fragrant the lilac blossom smelled.

Then she went back to her own great drawing-room, and opened the shutters and stepped out on to the balcony. The balcony was deep in shadow, but a band of sunlight streamed through the opening formed by the calle to her left, and it shone, full and seething, on the bridge, and rested with quivering, scintillating ripples on the little landing-place, and across the canal some ten feet from Linda's windows.

Just at that moment a gondola came round the corner from the sea, and stopped by the steps of the landing-place. The gondoliers began to altercate in loud, excited voices, and Linda caught the sound of her uncle's name: it seemed there was some confusion of addresses. The gondola was piled with luggage. It had come from the side of the port, and not from the station; the luggage looked like that of a soldier; and the servant of an English officer stood up by the steps for his master to land. Linda heard a low voice speaking in clear, insistent English to the Venetian gondolier, who bowed and smiled, for he did not understand one word of the language. Then she saw a figure emerging from the cover of the gondola with a sort of impatience, as though it despised the restraint of this foreign conveyance.

It was the figure of a young man, and he went up the steps and stood for a moment looking about him. He wore light, loose, grey clothes; he was extremely fair —indeed, his moustache and hair seemed nearly white in the dazzling sunshine; and the deep bronze of his skin was evidently due to long exposure in Eastern climates. A slightly haughty curve in his eyebrows told of a power, a necessity for rule. His deep-set eyes were dark blue; as they met the sunlight, scarcely blinking, they seemed very like the wistaria out in the garden at the back of the palace.

Suddenly he looked up at the balcony. Linda had not moved—she stood like one who is hypnotized. She was in shadow herself; but the reflected light of the piazza came

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up and played about her head and figure, and the ripples of the water seemed to quiver over the plaits of her dark hair, which were almost too heavy for her little girlish head.

The eyelids of the young man puckered like those of one who sees, but does not recognize. He made a slight movement forward. But Linda turned hurriedly and went into the house, and shut the shutters behind her.

What was the matter? What had happened? She sat on the edge of her bed absolutely still, as though something had struck her. There was silence all about her in the big silent house; then came a sound of voices, and a banging of boards in the cavernous halls of the old Venetian palace. Still she made no movement. She heard the voice of her uncle passing up the stairs. "Dudley!" it called. "Dudley, you splendid creature!"

Then she heard an odd, low, happy laugh in answer, and the sound of it almost hurt her. She heard steps going up the stairs outside her door to the big salone overhead. There was a discussion about the confusion of plans and addresses, . . . those things which interrupt, but never signify.

A sense of some sudden necessity seized upon Linda, safe as she was in her own apartments. She ran to her door and she locked it tight. Then she went back to the bed where she was sitting. She wanted to think.

"Dudley?" But Dudley was a boy, a regular Philistine English boy who had sometimes played with her, and often teased her. He was her cousin—Dudley was? He was a person who was nice, but who understood nothing—nothing at all about the things which mattered. He shot birds and he fished in the streams and he went to church against his will on Sundays. He always wore nice loose country clothes. Once he and Basil had quarrelled, she remembered—something about a pear or some cherries. . . . But that was all finished and done with long and long ago. There was nothing to do with herself in it all . . . it was all very far away and immaterial.

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But what was the matter? She felt she must escape; she must get away somewhere, somehow. . . . If only she could get away! His face and the whole figure of that young English officer down in the little piazza—why, it was splendid—it was like a thing in dreams! As she saw him stand there, it had seemed to her that nothing in all the whole world mattered outside it—that everybody and everything else had become as nothing at all to her.

Fresh sounds in the rooms above made her start again. There was an absolute necessity to escape. She went to her shelves; she took out her shadiest hat; noiselessly she dressed and noiselessly unlocked her door. Just as she did so, she heard her aunt calling for her, but she paid no heed, and almost like a thief she hurried down the little back staircase which led to the garden. She went through the garden stealthily, hurriedly. The scent of the wistaria seemed heavier than before, and it clung about her as though to pull her back; but a cone from the ragged Swiss pine fell, as she ran by the fountain, and she nearly tripped as she trod on it. For an instant she paused and looked up at the pine-tree, and a thought of the Alps came to her mind and passed again. She hurried through the door in the garden wall, and was lost in the crowd and the sunlight of the street.

Linda had been very much alone in her life, but never before had she felt such an entire unit as at that moment; it was as though her own personality suddenly possessed her to the exclusion of everything else—as though it had come to her rescue, closed round about her in order to protect her. She hurried past the familiar shops and through the little market-place of the Frari, where she was accustomed to come sometimes with Walpurga's maid to do the daily marketing. She did not notice any of her friends sitting outside their shop-fronts—those settled, watchful women of the people, deep-bosomed, passive, full of hidden love and passion. She did not notice their children, one

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or two of whom straddled out into the narrow calle to catch her hand. Her object seemed entirely one of unconscious escape, or, anyhow, of escapade. Entering a side-street she came across the old man who did small jobs about her cousin's palace, and who kept the garden going. She stopped without even considering her words.

"Giuseppe," she heard her own voice saying in clear, decided accents, "go on and tell my cousin I am not coming in for the midday meal, I am going to the Lido. I shall probably not be back till evening. I want to buy some flowers."

"Your servant," said the old man quietly, and hobbled down the calle. To very old men the whims and doings of girls seem often silly and tiresome.

"Going to the Lido!" But such a prospect had never been formed in her head; yet she found the way quickly to the landing-place and, taking the first steamer, she steamed out over the lagoon. It was a silent, blazing, midday heat; the steamer was practically empty.

The sun poured over Linda. She seemed to feel its beams entering her pulses, and she yielded to all its powers. On landing she took a lane which led rather inland than straight to the sea-front; she was accustomed to come here with her uncle in order to buy certain parrot-tulips at a market-gardener's. The garden had changed since last she was here; the parrot-tulips were going over, but there was a blaze of crimson and of orange ranunculuses, like the turbaned heads of an army of Turks, in the narrow beds by the canal, and overhead the acacia-trees were all in blossom; the scent of these flowers seemed almost more acute than that of the wistaria in her cousin's garden. Linda sat down in the cool shade of the grass; she was a little tired after her sudden rush from the house. The entire stillness around her, the shimmer of summer lights, the sense of man and of nature at rest, which is one of the good things in southern existence, fell on her spirit like waves of comfort.

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She seemed entirely to forget the cause of her curious escape from Venice, and she began to wish to be back again. She sat very still, wondering when the market gardener would have finished his siesta; she would then buy a bundle of ranunculus flowers, and go home quickly the way she had come.

But Dudley was in Venice. What had brought him to Venice? Would he go to the hills, too? Again some fear and revolt seized her; she got up, and walking further, she came at last to the open sands and the sea. Linda had never liked the sea—not in England, where she had been taken to the "seaside," and had suffered in sordid lodgings and on crowded and vulgar beaches; not on the Lido where fashionable persons walked up and down. It was not the great, wholesome sea itself that Linda minded, it was the people who compose the "seaside."

The afternoon boat had come in, and people were beginning to arrive at the bathing-place.

This put an end to Linda's capricious mood, for the commonplace has always power to calm us. She became perfectly herself and sober again. She walked back quietly to the market gardener; the man was awake, and for a franc he allowed her to pick as many of the ranunculus flowers as her hands would hold. With these she went back to the landing-place and took the first boat home again.

As the steamer entered the Grand Canal a sandalo shot close beneath her bows. In it were seated Sebastian and the young officer who had stood in the sunlit piazza that morning. Count von Herder and his gondolier were rowing. Linda's hat was over her eyes, and no one noticed the small girlish figure sitting alone on the steamer. She landed with other passengers, and hurried home the way she had come only some four hours since; she went up the stairs and straight to her cousin's sitting-room. The room was empty, the window was open, and the chair where her cousin usually sat was set in its usual place, her work was

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neatly folded on the little stool where she always kept it, and there was the usual bunch of clove carnations in a tumbler on the window-ledge. The big portraits of Walpurga's grandparents and of Linda's great-grandparents—both of them long since dead—looked down from their black oval frames on the wall with a certain austere precision which accentuated the already dignified austerity of the whole room. The father, who had been pastor of Trins, had his beard cut round his chin like a goat in the peculiar fashion of the Lutheran clergy. The mother wore a black lace cap, and every line in her face went the right way; she had been a truly beautiful woman and a distinguished one, for she came of a grand old peasant stock. There were various other portraits on the walls, all in black frames, all of the same type—severe, God-fearing men and women, who if they harboured any emotions had certainly learned to conceal them. But one portrait there was which, though it somehow fitted with the rest—for all good people have affinity—yet showed a perceptible difference. This was an early photograph of Linda's English mother, for whom Walpurga had felt, and expressed, a very sincere affection. Mary was looking straight at the camera. It was what you call a "speaking likeness." The great eyes had a searching sweetness in them, but in the mouth there lay a curious and almost painful restlessness. It was the face of a typical English lady, but it lacked something of the race and breeding of the hard-working men and women by which it was surrounded.

Linda had unconsciously sat down in her cousin's seat by the window; dazzled by the sunlight outside, she at first scarcely noticed the room, and she was dimly relieved not to find her cousin there. Rooms never fail to hold the presence of their owners, and Walpurga's dignified presence permeated this quiet place. Linda felt rested, and presently her eyes wandered round the walls, and unconsciously she noted a blank in the pictures; then she became aware that for once a thing or two was out of place in Frau Castel-

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berg's room. A book had been taken from a shelf, and a portrait down from the wall. Linda got up and looked at the book. It seemed so unlike Walpurga to read, still less to copy lyrics; yet here was one of Heine's exquisite lyrics in the full round hand of Walpurga's earlier days, and the book in which it was written was propped against a framed photograph—that of the Emperor of Trins, and his wife and their first son, Basil. It was an almost painful group, though it represented three practically perfect human specimens. The young mother and father—even the baby-boy—all three seemed burdened with the weight of human existence. Linda took it to the window and looked at it for a long while; then she put it back in its place and quietly went upstairs to her own rooms.

An hour later, when she came back to sit with her cousin, the book had gone back to its shelf, and the portrait was in its old place on the wall.

Walpurga touched very lightly on Linda's excursion to the Lido. She thanked her for the ranunculuses, though they were flowers, she said, which she cared little for. She had got her sewing as usual, and was stitching quietly at one of her long grey skirts. Linda looked at it curiously.

"I think, perhaps, I should like to dress like you, Cousin Walpurga," she said.

"Oh no, not at all," said Walpurga, "at least not for many and many years. You have far to travel before you come to my homespuns."

"Far to travel?"

"Yes," said Walpurga. "Life is long in any case. And if one sets out looking for things—for lots of impossible things which one never will find by any chance—then it is interminable."

"Do you mean one ought just to sit down at the very start?" said Linda rather fractiously.

"I mean nothing in particular," said Frau Castelberg.

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"It probably turns out just as we are made. . . . Your uncle has gone to the Lido," she continued in the same indifferent, low-toned voice. "They were looking for you, but you were gone out. Your cousin, Captain James, arrived very suddenly. Perhaps Maria told you about it—I left the message with her."

"Yes," said Linda, "Maria told me." The blood rushed suddenly to her face; she got up and went and leaned far out of the window.

"Be careful," said Walpurga—"one can sometimes lean too far."

"I thought he was in India," said Linda. "Anyhow, he went there years ago, and one hoped he might have stayed there." She was scraping at the stucco under the window-ledge, and dislodging the homes of some careful mason bees.

"Well, whether one hoped or no, he is come back to Europe," said Walpurga. "A fine young man but not like your mother or your Uncle Sebastian. They were perhaps a little unusual in a family of that sort."

The blush had gone from Linda's face; she sat up on the window-ledge with her back to the light. "What has he grown into?" she asked.

"He is very fair and he is a fine strong man," said Walpurga. "He will always be satisfied with his family, and with the mode in which that family conducts its life. As he grows older, he will become more and more what I believe you call a 'county gentleman.'"

"But he is in the Army," interrupted Linda.

"Where we are is not the point. It is only *what* we are which matters."

"But we can always become different to what we are," said Linda inconsequently. "He used to wear sort of stiff clothes and high stiff collars," she continued, unconscious perhaps of a note of interrogation. "And—well, the servants and everybody of that sort, always thought him wonderfully good-looking."

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"He wears a quite ordinary collar like other young men of his class," said Walpurga. "Maria seemed to think St. Michael had stepped out of the picture in the Frari when she saw him."

"He is not in the very least like St. Michael," said Linda hurriedly. "An English soldier, and Titian's St. Michael!" She twisted round angrily in her seat; and her cousin leant forward and moved the glass of carnations away from the window-ledge, where Linda's jerky movements seemed likely to upset it.

Walpurga was not at any time a great talker, but to-day she seemed to be in a reminiscent mood. She began to talk of the old days in Linda's Alpine house, and of the times when Linda's English relations came to Trins and stayed at the inn, with all the consequent social incongruities. Linda felt a little embarrassed.

"It is all very odd and a long way away—all that time and all those things," she said.

"Yes, you have plenty of new things," answered her cousin. "To me the old seem best—but we must all of us judge for ourselves. Your mother's people, and your father's people, they are very unlike. I have sometimes thought that at root, when we begin to look back instead of forward—that is to say, when we are fully developed—we become what our mothers and not what our fathers made us; and very much more we revert to the scenes and habits of our childhood. Yours was a happy childhood, in Trins, and you had many friends there."

"Why are you speaking of the past?" said Linda. "Why do you talk as though everything were over, when really it is all beginning?"

"For myself," said Walpurga, "I am not so certain about 'beginnings.' It seems to me sometimes as though everything were determined from the very outset. Put a bird in a cage, it had best be quiet. Beating the bars won't alter the case."

"But we are not in cages? We are entirely free."

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"So children think," said Walpurga. "At least, some children—not all of them." Unconsciously, perhaps, her eyes wandered to the wall where the picture was hung which a short time since Linda had found on the table; and Linda, following her gaze, caught the almost weirdly earnest eyes of the little Swiss boy, as with his elbows stiffly propped upon his mother's knee, he stood looking out into a world which already he had accepted rather than hoped for.

At that instant a gondola came round the corner of the canal below the window; it was Count von Herder's gondola, and Sebastian and Dudley were seated inside on the gorgeous Eastern cushions which von Herder affected to the disdain of the Venetians. They all three caught sight of Linda in the window, and once again her eyes seemed hypnotized by the sight of her English cousin. He smiled at her in a sort of grim way, just as he might have smiled at one of his polo ponies or any pretty child in the street. She straightened herself up, and for an instant she looked at him with a curious penetrating stare.

"We're not coming in," said Sebastian. "We came to ask if you'd come to the opera to-night, Linda—you and Frau Castelberg. "It's 'Mephisto' they're giving, and we have taken your tickets."

Linda stepped deliberately down from the window-ledge. "I do not want to go, Cousin Walpurga," she said, and she had never in the whole of her life, perhaps, spoken with such intense insistence. "I do not *mean* to go."

"Go where?" said her cousin, who had gone to fetch something in another part of the room, just as the boat came into sight.

"To the play with Uncle Sebastian and Count von Herder—and—and—I would far, far rather not go with them."

"But it is simple enough to say so, Linda? No one compels you to go to the play, and indeed it is far more

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suitable for you to have a quiet evening, you are very much overtired already."

Linda went back to the window.

"I won't come to-night," she said.

Of the three men, the only one who seemed disappointed was von Herder. He had come to regard Linda as a sort of asset in his daily enjoyment. Her waywardness, her earnestness, her general youth, to say nothing of her beauty, were factors of refreshment in his life. Sebastian, however, entered into a sort of playful altercation, to which Linda responded with her usual naïveté. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyebrows curiously arched above her eyes. Dudley glanced at her, but he did not look again, for it is not the habit of Englishmen to stare, even at their cousins. As the boat went off he lifted his hat. Linda—the little Swiss cousin—had grown extraordinarily pretty, he thought, but she still had a rather foreign look; also she seemed excitable.

Dudley went to his modest quarters in one of the smaller hotels of the Grand Canal. The heir to great riches himself, he had early learned the parsimony which so often accompanies these. He put on his evening clothes, and one of those stiff high collars to which Linda had objected as a child. Then he went rather solemnly down to the dining-room, and took the seat which the waiter had assigned him. As he sat at his little table, stiff in his bearing, immaculate in his dress, he represented to the American ladies who sat at another table not very far away the very emblem of English manhood. Dudley had secured a copy of "The Times," but he did not read it; he thought it would be more courteous not to do so, but he had not bowed to his neighbours as he took his seat—he did not appear so much as to know of their existence; that form of courtesy was not in Dudley's line. He ate his dinner silently, frowning a little. And outside the window where he sat, the last rays of the sunset fell on the statues of Santa Maria della Salute, and

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all the manifold life of the curious sea-city passed over its chief water-way unobserved, as it seemed, by the young English officer.

* * * * *

Dudley was hungry and he liked his dinner, but all the time he was thinking, and his thoughts were rather exhausting to him. What was he thinking of? Well, somehow or other, and almost unknown to himself, Dudley was thinking of his family circumstances inasmuch as they concerned his cousin Linda—and of other matters incidentally. He had never been in Venice, and as a sort of chance had landed him there to-day, he thought that he would stay a few days and "look up" the principal sights and pictures. Dudley was more of a James than a Crane; he was not very fond of pictures, and a little surprised at statues. Still, the right sort of people "looked" at these things, and one might as well take advantage of such an opportunity. Dudley had only heard of his leave a short time before he started; there was no time to get a letter from his people in India, so he told his mother to send him a line to meet him at Brindisi. Mrs. James had written to Brindisi. She told him his Uncle Sebastian was in Venice, and that she and her husband and Susan were also coming to Italy soon, so they could all meet together in Venice, or in "some nice little rustic place" which Sebastian had spoken of. Mrs. James usually wrote in a hurry and gave wrong addresses. This time she gave Frau Castelberg's address instead of Sebastian's, but she quite forgot to mention that Linda was staying with Frau Castelberg. Dudley thought for a moment about his Uncle Sebastian; he had never been very much attached to his uncle—there was something disconcerting about his way of life, something "artistic" or "peculiar"—a little disreputable in fact; and Dudley liked everything to be in proper social order. On the other hand, Sebastian could tip schoolboys on a very liberal scale; and he could jump high gates and sit on a horse as well as any man. But Dudley had one peculiarly unpleasant memory

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of his uncle. He remembered one evening when, as a boy returning from Eton, he had run to his uncle's study and had found him smoking a pipe over his fire in company with a stonemason! Well—after all, he had probably changed by this time. . . .

And then about Linda? As far as Dudley could recollect, Linda herself was most uncomfortably tied up with a set of Swiss relations—peasants and artisans. But in spite of this she had often been disconcerting—more disconcerting even than his uncle. She had far more spirit than most of the other little girls with whom, in moments not to be remembered without shuddering, Dudley had been obliged to dance at Christmas parties in his mother's drawing-room. Linda had always come to England looking like a rather curious small farm-child; but when they had put her into white frocks and let down her splendid hair she had had quite an odd effect on his youthful emotions. Indeed, his cousin Linda conveyed to the sporting mind of Dudley the impression which a well-bred pony might do. No one had ever been known to take a second liberty with her, if, indeed, they had been foolish enough to take a first one. . . .

* * * * *

Thus far Dudley had got with his thinking. He paused because the waiter had brought him some beef. He was very fond of beef, and for a moment the current of his thoughts was diverted by it. Then the thoughts came pressing back again. He began to think of himself. . . . It is true he was not clever, but he was not stupid either; hitherto life had been perfectly smooth for him, and he saw no reason that it should not so continue. As far as worldly position went, his own was entirely secure. His father, it is true, was not an old man, but he had a large property which was entailed on his only son. In the meantime Dudley would remain in the service which, as quite a young boy, he had always determined to enter, and to which he was much attached. He had no great interests outside this

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service, and the pursuits of a country gentleman would keep very well for later years.

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A very foreign-looking sweet had been served, something stuck all over with little almonds or pine-kernels, and looking more like a porcupine than a decent pudding. Dudley rejected it . . . his thoughts went back to his family. . . . He remembered that much the most disturbing element in the placid flow of the Crane and James history had been the perfectly unlooked-for, unheard-of, and undesired love episode in the life of one of its daughters. His dead aunt, Mary Crane, hitherto gentle and in every sense "ladylike," had, without any precedent, become passionately and immoderately attached to the doctor in a small Swiss village. Not only the surface, but the very pebbles at the base of that well-ordered family pool, had been stirred by the facts of this marriage. The man, it is true, was well enough in his own way; but his birth was perfectly obscure, his people were practically unpresentable in the society which the Cranes themselves frequented. All the same, Mary had silently and obstinately stuck to her intention, and to the "discomfort"—to use a very mild expression—of all her reputable relations, she had plunged them into a most embarrassing connection.

Though this was more or less the sentiment left upon minds powerless to express themselves very forcibly, and still less able to expand into wider social standards than their own, it is useless to deny that the dignity and aloofness, not only of the doctor himself, but of his entire family, combining with the general look of race and breeding in the child born of the unwelcome marriage, had a trick of quite disconcerting the angry feelings of the family. And, as it is not only wiser, but also decidedly far easier, not to think more than is necessary of any disagreeable family connection, Dudley in his well-ordered Indian life had allowed the matter to pass from his mind during the last three years or so.

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But here—by some bounce in the walk of that hoyden whom we call Fortune—the whole situation was brought up before him! The beauty of natural environment has a far less positive effect on some natures than it has on others, and Dudley indeed was not conscious of its workings at all. Still, the May sun in Venice can touch even hearts of wood, and make the sluggard's blood to boil, and Dudley's was neither of these.

He pushed aside his plate and he rose from the table. Those had been his thoughts. How splendid and distinguished he looked. How gallantly he bore himself as he passed down the narrow dining-room!

About ten minutes later the porter in the hall announced that two gentlemen were waiting for him in their boat, and Dudley went out of the hall and down the steps of the landing. It was with a feeling of some disgust that he beheld his companions for the opera house dressed in the same unconventional dress as they had worn during their afternoon cruise. Certainly Count von Herder's heavy Tyrolean boots did not suggest a box at the Fenice, or any other opera house. Dudley in his immaculate evening clothes joined them rather haughtily, and some Brazilian ladies who had come on the balcony imagined that every one of the three must be a "lord"—the one because he was so faultless in, the other two because they so dared to disregard, the conventions of personal attire.

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CHAPTER XX

CARDINALE

It was not the habit of Sebastian to follow in the ordinary footsteps of the tourist. He loved art, but he loved better the country from which the people had sprung who produced this art, and he loved best of all the people themselves who still lived on and toiled there. When he said that he would go to the hills, he had no intention of seeking out some inn in which to stay; he had determined to find quarters in a romantic villa to which some chance had led him in the previous autumn, and which he now heard was to be let for the payment of a song. The villa was large. It would hold not only Sebastian's party, but also that of Mrs. James, who had long proposed an Italian visit to her brother.

In England we hire, at enormous cost, some dingy lodging, where, in barbarous discomfort and humiliation of every conceivable description, we lodge ourselves for some uneaseful weeks of what we needs must term our "holidays." In Italy we can, for one-tenth part of the sum, live sumptuously, and like the ancient dukes, in almost any town or village we may choose from.

Cardinale was the name of the small and scattered hamlet—one could barely call it a village—which, hidden in a fold of the Euganean Hills, is scarcely known to the outside world. Yet there is a garden there which is one of the loveliest things in Europe, and it was to this garden that Sebastian's thoughts were turned.

The house to which the garden belongs is itself insignificant. Fire, or perhaps a period of ill-taste, has destroyed

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the original building, which must have dated, to judge by the age of one of the avenues in the garden, to some time about 1700. The new building is commonplace enough—a square, roomy house with one long loggia on the front, and a flight of steps leading down to the pleasaunce. Still, such as it was, and amidst such surroundings, even the villa itself possessed a charm of its own on the hot May afternoon when Sebastian and his party arrived at its doors. Sebastian had sent his servants before him. These consisted of the gondolier, his wife, and their eldest children, all of whom were to do various odd jobs in the easy-going household. And Count von Herder, thankful for any opportunity of change, had also packed for Cardinale, but had taken rooms in the village inn, as Walpurga, to whom the expedition had suggested difficulties, had insisted that only under these conditions might Linda accompany her uncle.

A blazing May day. Sebastian, Linda, and Count von Herder left the train at Abano, and embarked on the cranky pea-green fly which was in waiting for them at the station. How hot the air was—the sky so blue it seemed almost to be white at its edges. As they rattled and joggled along over the great broad road built by the Emperor Napoleon one hundred years ago, Linda drank in for the first time the pleasure of the Italian plains. And the plain that day was in its glory—a perfect festival of May. On either side of the road, which was raised some ten feet high above the level ground, ran a broad ditch or dyke. The surface of this water was densely covered with white and yellow water-lilies; pink flowering rush and a tangle of blue and yellow vetches smothered the banks, with big moon daisies and other common flowers. To right and left were the fields of corn and maize, full grown now, and already slightly changing from green to yellow under the burning suns of May. Each field was guarded by its mulberry and willow hedges, and these were festooned with garlands of vine.

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Presently they left the great highroad, and took a turning to the left which led towards the hills. And as they neared the hills a different atmosphere seemed to come out to meet them. The heat came in puffs from the banks and hedges. They left the open ditches and passed between banks on which grew trees of white acacia. The blossoms fell like snowy tassels against the blue sky overhead. There was a seething and a humming of insects in the air. Flocks of geese, turkeys, and guinea-fowl, driven by little girls in thick pink cotton petticoats, flew off frightened by the unfamiliar carriage. They also met women staggering homewards, with huge baskets of mulberry-leaves to feed their silkworms, bending their backs; and as they passed the scattered peasant homes, they could see, through the open windows, the curious wooden frameworks which looked like spinners' looms, but which were actually the homes of the silkworms. As they passed the people stood to stare—strangers are rare in the Euganean Hills—and von Herder's great wolf-hound, panting in the dust behind them, excited at once their terror and their admiration. The carriage was loaded with a miscellaneous collection of luggage, and von Herder's long legs straddled over the case of his violoncello, whilst the portmanteaux and the book-boxes of Sebastian threatened at every instant to fall from the seat where they were piled.

But nothing of such merely material moment as this affected Linda. Small and slight herself, she took but little space in the clumsy carriage, and propped on a huge portmanteau, she sat quite still, her large eyes full of dreams, looking out through her pale oval face on to the new and exquisite pageant through which they now were passing. Sebastian, full of curious fads, had bought for her a long green veil; he said that ladies should wear green veils on journeys. It formed a sort of mist around her white straw hat, and hung out far behind, across the hold-alls and portmanteaux. Her little holland frock hung loose about her figure, for she had grown thin in Italy. Her brain was in a

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condition of passive, seething acceptance, and she seemed with all her being to respond to the natural movement of the life about her.

All this time, with her subconscious self, she was thinking of Dudley Crane. Dudley had stayed in Venice, and they had come off to the hills. Why had they come to the hills. To her it seemed waste and folly—or, if they had come, why had Dudley not come with them? Dudley in the hills—in the long May days? Oh! Oh! Oh! . . .

There was a curious smell of peat about his clothes, yet he had worn them in Indian forests; and his deep blue eyes looked straight at their object. Amidst the theories of Sebastian and the paradoxes of von Herder, Dudley seemed like a silent god of stone; and the bewildered, passionate soul of the girl responded to his dumbness and his strength, regardless of a certain shallowness and denseness too which went along with it. Still, she had left the place where Dudley was, and she had come to the hills. What to do? What did people like her Uncle Sebastian actually do? They seemed to do nothing but talk and walk, walk and talk; tear old things to pieces and not build new ones up. Yet she loved her Uncle Sebastian. He was certainly quite as worthy of love as many more outwardly worthy and "busy" persons, and in a sense his personality was the most dominant factor in her life. Lots of people—most people—were doing things all day long. And what about that, after all? The mere *doing?* Linda's father had gone back home; in another fortnight she would be following him. Dimly she felt that the period of dreams was done—or would, anyhow, then be done; dimly she desired some sort of fulfilment of something first, something warm and strong; final and perfect, yet strange and fearful to the touch. She thought of her mother—there surely had been a romance? . . . What was she dreaming of? . . .

Her uncle and Count von Herder, who had been buried

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in metaphysics for the last half-hour, had suddenly returned to a discussion of realities.

"Is not your nephew coming to join us?"

"Yes, to-morrow, but only for a night or two. Dudley in the Euganean Hills! Poor innocent giant!—he is grappling with Tintoretto at this very instant! He said he would try to 'do' a little Venice, as he happened to be there. We Cranes are hopelessly economical, you know—and we don't come to Italian cities every day of our lives. . . ."

The carriage, which had been going along at a sort of jog-trot, the animal between the shafts looking more dead than alive, gave a sudden lurch forward, for they were approaching a little village. The driver turned on his box. "Ecco! Ecco Cardinale!" he cried, with a sort of sumptuous pride, as though he had been heralding the sight of Rome, and he whipped his horse to a gallop.

Linda stood up in the carriage. Just a broad dusty road stretched bare to the burning midday sun, with a few low cottages scattered to right and to left of it, some hens crooning in the gutter, and one or two workmen asleep on the shady side of the pavement; to the right, a sort of barn-like church, painted all over without and within with white-wash; and the campanile standing away at a little distance, tall and slender, and with its big black bells against the sky and a little tiled roof on the summit. On the other side of the church was the house of the priest.

Don Pedro was standing in the garden, his arms resting on the wall and a blue cotton handkerchief hanging from the corner of his big beaver hat. A curious smile crept over his enigmatical eyes when he caught the first sight of the carriage. He knew all about its inhabitants—priests know many things—but he made no movement of welcome. Sebastian, on the other hand, cried aloud with delight. "Don Pedro! Don Pedro!" he called, "we are come—see, we are here! All of us are here. This is my niece,

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and this my friend. You will lunch with us, dine with us, breakfast with us. And we will discourse upon heaven and hell."

"Madman! Englishman!" muttered the priest, but there was a sly benevolence in his wrinkled eyelids. He did not look at von Herder or Sebastian; he was watching Linda—possibly she pleased him.

"And you—you little English miss—what have you come to try and to do here?—what sort of fool are you making of yourself?"

Linda had heard of Don Pedro. "I am no greater fool than others," she said a little hotly.

"Yes, but you are—just a little more and just a little less. But you like blue birds—do you hear mine singing?"

"Yes," said Linda, and she jumped from the carriage. She had heard of all Don Pedro's birds before.

She went through the priest's garden and up into his house. Although he had laughed at her, she instinctively felt that he liked her. She went straight into the little dark passage and then to the parlour. The house of Don Pedro was cool and quiet. Old prints of unexpected persons hung on the walls. There was Napoleon and Queen Elizabeth on either side of Leo X. Pyramids of books and of pamphlets which had overflowed from the bookshelves littered the floor, the tables, the chairs. A great black crucifix stood on the central table, but somehow it seemed set there as a reminder, rather than as a general factor in the life of the owner of the house. The shutters were closed, but bars of light crept through the cracks and fell through the bars of all the cages which hung from the ceiling. Here was a whole citadel of singing birds—linnets, canaries, goldfinch, and nightingales—and in a prominent place one beautiful passero solitario, the bird Leopardi loved.

"Oh, what a room!" said Linda delightedly. But the birds were not accustomed to persons of her type. Her hat and her green veil frightened them. They ceased to

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sing and fluttered in the utmost agitation around their cages, so Linda sat down on a chair for a moment. Don Pedro was still leaning over the wall parrying thrusts with the occupants of the carriage; she could see him through a chink of the window-shutters. A proof sheet of some title-page had fluttered to the floor with the movement of the birds, and as she picked it up she noticed the title: "On Divorce."

So a priest in a remote Italian village, who might have composed all the lyrics of Arcady or the devotional prayers of an anchorite, was engaged on a work concerning "divorce." In life it happens that we gather to ourselves at various moments the type of thread with which our moods are connected. Linda started painfully when she realized the eccentric title of the book this isolated parish priest was writing. She knew that he was a writer, she knew he was a student and something of a cynic; but that the trend of his mind was in a direction of this sort she certainly never suspected. She put the paper carefully back in its place, and she sat for a moment quite still on the big horsehair sofa which formed a prominent feature in the room. Her head was a little heavy, her thoughts were disconnected. Who shall say whether we who are dreamers—and Linda was certainly a dreamer—ever actually connect our thoughts? Do they not come and go at random—old questionings of spirits which lived before us, and will go on living after us?—old dreams dreamt by people of our own blood long and long ago. . . .

Why these weird and sudden contrasts, these intellectual misfits and misfortunes, when the whole scheme of existence was really one of the binding together of body and of soul? That was the question which haunted Linda. The music was playing all around her out there in the fields and the hedges. What millions of water-lilies there had been in the ditches, their golden cups bent flat to the sun and the insects. And here were three men of vastly different types, all at war with the exquisite scheme of the Universe.

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Don Pedro had only one illuminated text hung up in his room: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." Why that text of all others? And priests and monks, after all? And a church? Why not be simply happy and good and helpful? Why ever harm one another or *interfere?* . . .

* * * * *

Don Pedro had turned from the carriage and was coming towards the house, waving the blue cotton handkerchief which he usually wore beneath his beaver hat, and which he had removed in the shade of the garden.

"Give us your blessing," shouted von Herder.

"No," said Don Pedro, "you are heretics—heretics; and one of you is even an Englishman?"

"Where is Linda, then? Tell her to come away from the birds. We are waiting for our dinner."

Don Pedro gave a curious turn in his walk.

"Miss Linda is still at the poste restante," he said. "See that she stays there."

He entered the house, and came into the sitting-room. He did not look at Linda or speak to her as she rose from the sofa and came towards him. He took up his breviary, reopened the page, and sitting himself down at the table with a heavy sigh, he covered his forehead with one large white hand—the hand of a peasant who had never held a spade—and he began to read, repeating the words half aloud to himself in the curious monotonous nasal intonation of the priest. It was impossible for Linda to know whether he noted her presence or not, and she went from the room, closing the door behind her.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE SUNDIAL

UP at the villa there were great preparations for a meal. The shutters were closed, and a lovely fresh smell of newly washed scagliola pervaded the whole of the dwelling. The big villa was but barely furnished, and the round table spread for the midday feast looked very small indeed in the great *sala di ballo:* "Una vera miseria," explained the extravagant gondolier, "but we have done our best with it; and the gardener has brought in these few flowers to please the signorina." He waved his hands towards the walls.

If this were "misery," what indeed might be described as comfort and luxurious living, Linda wondered. She stood a moment alone in the splendid apartment, before going into her own room to wash her hands and shake away the dust of her long journey.

"A few flowers!" The gardener at Cardinale had once seen service with a great French lady, and gained from her a sense of lavish decoration. Under each big mirror, between the six long windows and the statues which divided up the hall, there stood red marble tables, and on each of these an enormous majolica flower-vase. These he had filled with boughs of flowering shrubs—white spirea, lilac, wistaria, and yellow banksia roses. The room was indeed a veritable bower, and the curious frescoes on its walls, of blue sky, trellises, and little birds, in which Italians so delight, harmonized perfectly with the natural flowers in that dim and shuttered light.

Some ancestral love of sumptuous living came seething

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up in Linda's soul, for there was noble and also profligate blood in her veins from her maternal grandmother.

"Dance!" said Count von Herder, who entered the room at that moment. "Here, of course, one must dance."

For some unaccountable reason von Herder had entirely changed his wonted costume, and he stood by one of the tall mirrors a thing transfigured—in a pale grey suit and the thinnest of shoes. The worldly restless expression had not altered—it was indeed accentuated; but he looked the man of breeding that he really was, and might well have turned the head of a less impressionable girl.

In a minute Linda was dancing. A curious, a sort of passionate sensation of the rhythmic joy of movement came over her. She became giddy, but she did not want to stop. Round and round they valsed, down the whole length of the hall and in and out and round the tables. If von Herder could do nothing else he could dance; there were times, indeed, in his past life when he had almost danced himself to death.

But, whereas his partner was wholly engrossed in her sensations of movement, von Herder could note very accurately what was happening in the room, and he saw that the English cousin had arrived a day too early, and that he was standing in the doorway watching this small bacchanalian revel. Then von Herder gradually slackened his step. He had gathered the slim girlish figure close in his arm, and, as though unwillingly, he allowed her to sink on one of the two big sofas which stood just facing the door. She was dazed by all the movement, and her hands rested with the palms upward and the little brown fingers loosely bent upon the yellow cushions beside her. She was rather pale, her lips parted, and an odd, far-away look in her eyes as of someone seen in a trance. The braids of her hair were loosened and fell down in two great plaits upon her shoulders.

Dudley had never in the whole of his existence seen anything to compare with her for wild and attractive beauty,

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combining with something which somehow needed protection. His first instinct—a sort of prehistoric impulse arising from the sense of possession by race—was to knock von Herder down; his next was to do what von Herder himself had done—to dance in his turn with the beautiful girl. The last, and the one which prevailed, because our outward man which has been tutored is sure to prevail with the normal social being, was to do the right thing—to bid his cousin and her friend good-day, and to inquire after his Uncle Sebastian, to whom, after all, his visit was paid.

Then Linda sat up with a start.

"What on earth have you come for to-day?" she said; and a crimson blush, which might either have betokened indignation or embarrassment, came over her face. She gathered up the heavy plaits of her hair, and began to coil them quickly round her head.

"I'm sorry to be here too soon," said Dudley, and some natural courtesy bade him cover the situation with a joke . . . "but I should have missed the dance had I come to-morrow."

"Well, there's nothing to prove that! I dance, or I don't dance. And anyhow, it's time to dress for lunch." She picked up her hat, and her cloak, and the long green veil, and she walked with a certain wayward dignity out into the passage. Von Herder took up the paper, and Dudley went out on the balcony.

Linda had gone to her bedroom, which was on the shady side of the house. There was almost a winter chill about it; the great windows commanded a view of one of those mad rococo rockeries dear to the heart of the domestic architect in Italy. An immense Neptune presided, in a certain sumptuous and decaying mouldiness, over a tank of goldfish; and the fronds of innumerable pale young ferns were uncurling over the ruins of last year's leaves.

The room was one likely to produce on a sensitive spirit a rather mournful and sobering effect. Linda, entering from the heat and shimmer of the dining-hall, flushed as

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she was with the sudden irritation caused by the unexpected arrival of Dudley, felt a curious check. She stood a second in the middle of the chamber and became conscious of the unearthly representation of herself in the three huge mirrors, which, with the exception of the bed, two tall chairs, and a table, formed the only other furniture of the apartment. The mirrors were as mouldy as the rockery outside. Every object which they reflected took an uncanny green and lurid hue, like the image on the mind of some morbid and decadent poet. Linda's modest trunk had been unpacked, and the gondolier's daughter had put out a blue cotton frock, the colour of the Venetian sky, and laid it on the bed. A single red rose lay on the dressing-table, and the icy water had been poured from the curious little ewer, for Italians love cold water to their cheeks. Linda bathed her face. She got into the fresh print gown, but she did not pin the rose in her breast and the mildewed mirrors reflected something fresh and tidy rather than poetic as she turned and went back to the dining-hall.

The meal had begun. A huge pile of macaroni steamed in the centre of the table; the gondolier had brought in the wine in big white litre vases with blue scrolls painted on them, and was pouring it into tall glass tumblers, so that it frothed as though it were beer.

"Wine of Arqua, vintage of poets, io ti saluto!" cried Sebastian, rising to his feet as he held the beautiful orange draught high to the sunlight. Count von Herder rose, too, and waved his glass towards Linda. "Io ti saluto!" he cried. But Dudley stuck to his chair, and a sort of disdainful smile crept round his handsome lips, and a slightly deeper pucker crossed his forehead. He made room for Linda beside him, and she took her seat grudgingly, as it were, between him and von Herder at the round table. Sebastian was busy ladling out the macaroni.

"Giuseppe, it's absurd! I can't grapple with this thing! Come, help it yourself!" Giuseppe took the steaming dish and served it round in true Italian fashion.

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Linda was hungry, and her spirits rose as the macaroni vanished, and the pollo, the asparagus, and the wonderful frothing savognino succeeded it.

How warm it felt in that beautiful villa! The men lighted their cigarettes. Outside the fountains splashed, and the fantail pigeons cooed and curtsied in the sun. Sebastian got up and went to the end of the room, and looked, as an artist might, at the scene of the little lunch-party: "You Linda," he said, "should be dressed in brocade, and we men clothed in satin. We want an ape, a peacock—lots of hounds and dwarfs and manodolins. What a scene! Just look at it. A regular Veronese banquet, and yet here we creatures of a sorry century sit in our beastly tweeds—and Linda, there, with some pretence to looks, tricked out no better than a charity-school girl in that old cotton gown."

Unconsciously, almost, the English officer glanced round at the girl beside him: "Do you still like old clothes?" he asked. "I remember the first old gown you wore when you came to visit England."

"It had black velvet round the skirt," said Linda. "I hated it really" . . . then she paused, "but I wasn't going to tell you or Susan that."

"Why not?" asked Dudley.

The other two men had pushed their chairs away from the table and taken them out on the sunny loggia.

"Well, because I wasn't, I suppose. And, anyhow, this is not an old dress. It's one that Uncle Sebastian chose himself—don't you like it?" she asked, with a sudden swift impulse, looking straight at him.

"Oh, I don't know—yes—let's have a look at it—it's a sort of an Italian stuff, isn't it?" He leaned forward as though to touch her skirt, but he did not do so. "It's not a pretty stuff," he said. "But somehow I seem to like it, taken all together."

"Taken all together?" repeated Linda.

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"Yes, with you in it—I suppose that's about what one meant." Dudley had a little stutter in his speech. Words did not come easy to him.

"Do you like India very much?" said Linda.

"I hadn't thought about it particularly—liking, or not liking it, I mean. I live there—I've got to like it. It's my work."

"How dull!" said Linda.

"What's dull?"

"Why, not to know whether one likes or doesn't like a place—just simply to *live* there—only to look at it as a work."

"But, after all, that's what it is, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Linda, "I . . ."

"You?"

"Oh I—I think things are absolutely *splendid*—too good to be true. Venice and this place—I can't even talk about it. I feel it may stop if I do."

"But that's fudge," said Dudley. "Things don't stop in that way." Again he looked at her straight. And he saw what perhaps he had not noticed before so distinctly—he saw that his little Swiss cousin was a person to be very much reckoned with. He saw how very much he liked to look at her, and she was looking back at him. There was a sort of blaze in her eyes:

"How stupid you are!" she said. And, as she pushed aside her plate and napkin, she upset a tall goblet of salt, and it fell across the table.

"I've upset the salt!" she cried.

"Well, that is no great loss."

"Yes, but the luck?" She hurriedly threw a pinch across her shoulder. She wished terribly that the salt had not been spilled. And yet, after all, what could it matter?

"Let's come out on the balcony," she said.

Dudley seemed loath to rise. "It's so hot outside," he objected.

"I love the sun. It goes right through me. It does me good."

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"You look awfully well," he said. "What more good do you want, Linda?" He seemed to alight on her name quite unexpectedly, and then to linger there. He rose hurriedly from his chair and went out into the sunlight to join the other men on the loggia.

"The paper! the paper!" cried Sebastian. "Where is the *Secolo?* Bring me the *Secolo* and coffee—and coffee, Giuseppe mio."

"And vermuth—vermuth!" von Herder called.

"Nay," wailed Sebastian, "rosolio—rosolio if you love me!"

Linda began to think again:

How these men worried about their bodies' needs, whilst before their very eyes lay the loveliest garden in all north Italy perhaps! How could they ever dream of newspapers and vermuth and rosolio? Linda had drawn her chair to the loggia edge. She rested her chin on the marble balustrade. The sun fell straight on her uncovered head. Where was her heart?—what forces may unconsciously have been stirring there? For the moment her eyes rested, full of curious insight, on the scene before her.

It is perhaps in Italy alone that men can build gardens which at once become nature and yet remain formal. Here in these remote volcanic hills Nature had received into her exquisite arms a deeply human plan. These terraces, these avenues, these statues, and these fountains, were as certainly a part of the surrounding nature as the wild and tangled copses up above them sown by some fugitive bird—seeds blown by some lazy breeze. And yet in the neglected garden, though man had now no real voice, he seemed to clamour for speech and expression.

Sebastian had been watching his niece, with half an eye, across his newspaper.

"Love is, after all, made in the garden, and not on the hill-top," he suggested, cutting the sheets of his *Secolo* with a great tortoise-shell paper-knife.

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"Apropos of what?" said von Herder, a little tartly. The vermuth was of an inferior quality, and he was too old to be watching the glow on a young girl's hair and neck.

"Apropos de bottes," said Sebastian. . . . "Ha! he's at it again."

"Yes," said von Herder, and he mentioned a name at that minute much before the public. "A. has been making an ass of himself again."

"I don't see that," interposed Dudley rather unexpectedly. He seemed to be suddenly awake—to take a well-kept weapon out of its sheath, which he presented all glittering to an antagonist.

The three men then became suddenly serious, and their attitude assumed a totally different aspect. They seemed to be talking about something which mattered—a thing which counted in their varied existences. Yet what was it all about, thought Linda—these abstract doings of quite intangible people, these indefinite disputes between nations? Some little State about to go to war thousands of miles away? On Linda, who at first had tried to listen, a sense of ennui and of weariness gradually but firmly spread. What, after all, could it signify—what mattered it, even in the most elementary way—what a man in a stuffy Parliament House was saying to, or about, another man? What had this to do with the human or the natural situation? How dull!—how dead!—how distant and forlorn the subject seemed!—as dull as the paragraphs of the newspapers she never even glanced at!

For to-day the sun and the garden! She left her seat and the group of talkers, and she went down the sunny terraces and paths till she came to the ponds; she sat on the edge of one of the cool marble tanks beneath the ilex-trees, and she began to throw in little pebbles to the fish. They came and nibbled. How stupid they looked, the little red fish, flapping their pale white fins and taking aimless rushes in the water! What a life—what a dull

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life—down in this tank, and all the world outside them. All the world!—*all the beautiful, wonderful world!*

Unconsciously the girl's lips moved, and she repeated "all the beautiful world!" Having done so once, she did it again, louder and louder still. She did not notice footsteps on the grass behind her. They were firm, silent footsteps, those of the priest, Don Pedro. He was up quite close beside her now.

"'Il mondo e rotondo,'" he said. What he meant by quoting this Italian proverb at that particular moment it is impossible, perhaps, to say; but Linda never forgot it. She found it fitting into her life at many odd points as she grew older.

"I did not see you," she said, starting to her feet, and holding out her hand. The priest clasped his own behind his back, but he looked quite friendly, with the curious enigmatic friendliness peculiar to his heavy and inscrutable countenance.

"Have you seen the stables?" he said.

"No."

"Have you seen the church?"

"No."

"Have you seen Arquà?"

"No."

"Have you driven to Este?"

"No."

"No. You have seen nothing, *nothing*. You are an ignorant—almost an imbecile—you are half an Englishwoman, and I hate them. . . . Have you seen the sundial?"

"No."

"Come, for the sundial!" He wheeled round ponderously, and began walking much more quickly than one would have expected, and Linda followed him. They went away from the direction of the village, they crossed the stream and came to a part of the grounds which Linda had not discovered. Here they passed through a high wall of trees, and came out unexpectedly on a big open space

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which seemed to be densely overgrown with yew—countless intersecting hedges of yew.

"'Il mondo e rotondo,'" said the priest. "This is in squares, but it is all the same. Have you seen the labyrinth?"

"No."

"This is the labyrinth. Come, follow, follow!"

He plunged through an almost invisible opening in the hedge and entered a narrow walk; he looked over his shoulder once to see if Linda was coming, and then he walked, with his curious bear-like paces, forward and on into the depths of the intricate maze. The place was rather ill kept up; it was evident that the gardener had left it alone this season. Tracts of honeysuckle had crossed in places from hedge to hedge, and pale grey toadstools reared their heads along the paths, or fell in tattered slimy groups about the gravel.

"The obstacles are small," said the priest. "See, one breaks them—so!" He spread his arms and precipitated himself through a tangle of creepers. "On the mushrooms one treads—thus!" and he planted his broad-toed foot on a graceful fringe of fungi.

"And so we do with our own obstacles, heh?" he inquired.

"It seems a pity to break the beautiful things!" said Linda. She herself stooped and avoided them when she was able. "Obstacles must be overcome," said her companion. "If we get round them, they engulf us eventually. 'Il mondo e rotondo.'"

After what seemed an almost interminable meandering, they emerged suddenly on a little open plot of lawn. On a stone pedestal, supported by a flight of low steps, stood an old dial.

"Come, signorina," said the priest," and look what is written here." Linda approached, and she stood on the steps and deciphered, with some difficulty, the words on the old copper plate.

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"Segno le ore sì. Ma non più quelle."

There was not a cloud in the splendid May sky. There was only a thread of shadow on the dial. Linda was in the perfect heyday of her youth and health, and her surroundings were intensely congenial; the presence of the priest with all his abrupt discourtesy was welcome too; yet, in spite of these things, perhaps just because of them, a spasm of melancholy flashed across her spirit. What hours—why?

"Segno le ore sì. Ma non più quelle."

She bent over the stone and began to push away tiny fragments of moss which were creeping across the letters. Some curious thoughts coursed through her head, and she did not observe the departure of Don Pedro. Something strange, I might say almost ecstatic, swelled from her heart to her throat. Were these the hours? . . . The time flew by; she was anxious to clear the stone and to think about something else. Presently she lifted her head and became aware that she was alone, but it did not disturb her. Standing on tiptoe on the steps, she could see the villa far away across the sunny garden through the trees. The men were still on the balcony, but she could not hear them talking, for they were just too far away. Presently she saw Don Pedro walking up the avenue to join the group on the balcony, and she saw them talk and altercate and call a servant. Then she thought it was time to go back, and she turned in a leisurely way to retrace her steps. Linda knew nothing of mazes; she remembered that the way had been more or less long in coming, but now it seemed absolutely interminable. The little path turned and twisted and diverged; it seemed to lead nowhere at all. She began to hurry. Then she determined to retrace her steps, to find the open space and the sundial. But no, it was impossible—she found herself nowhere again—just turning and twisting through a host of new paths. Soon she grew impatient, then hot, and finally angry. "Obstacles must be overcome," she found herself repeating, and she angrily bent

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some wayward briars which seemed only to tighten again on her path. At last she gave a call. It seemed an indignity to call for help when lost in such a sorry space. But she called to air—no answer came to her beyond the faint echo of her own voice from the hill above. She called again—again; then a feeling almost like fear came over her. Thus does the child, grown to a woman, feel often lost in the mazes of her own tiny world. Again she began to walk; she walked more slowly, seeking this time a clue. The yew hedges were just a foot taller than herself, so it was not possible to get any clue of exit by leaning out to look at the garden. Her only hope lay in the return of the truant Don Pedro. But he did not come. At last she thought she heard a step, and she lifted her voice imploringly. An answer this time came, and in it she recognized the stern and rather grudging accents of Dudley Crane, evidently in altercation with some Italian, whose language he could not understand.

"I am here—I am here, Dudley!" she called.

She caught her breath—"Dudley." What meant a little word like that? As a child she had called it persistently, and as often as not she had called it merely to tease. How kind he had been to her—taken all round—the handsome English boy! Lost in the maze of the Italian garden, a memory of him returned to her as she had seen him once, coming back from shooting in the mellow autumn light: the gold of the beechwoods framed him in; he had his gun, but his father's keepers were carrying the birds they had shot, and she remembered how he had got between her and the sight of the dead birds which he knew would hurt her, and how he had given her a pretty tuft of black cock's feathers, and when she refused them he had tickled her cheek, thrown them away, and then gone after the keepers.

But here Dudley was coming. His head looked over the wall of yew, and his eyes were laughing a little:

"Come along," he said, "we've all been waiting."

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Angry explanations boiled within her, but she kept them down, for Dudley was not alone. A labourer accompanied him, to explain the intricacies of the maze. The young man was a native of the spot, and worked in the garden under the gardener; his home was in the hills above; in a little cleared space among the woods his cottage stood, and there his wife sat by the door and rocked their baby in its wooden cradle. The young man had the lithe and easy movements of a creature who had never known the trammels of a city; he smiled with a curious, graceful smile at Linda. Her figure, in the perfectly simple blue print gown, appealed to his exquisite sense of beauty and of fitness. The stiff young Englishman did not strike him quite so favourably. Linda began to talk to him in her quick, incisive Italian, forgetting at once her fear and her sense of despair and desertion.

"There is a wonderful sundial," she said over her shoulder to Dudley. "You ought perhaps to see it? We might just look at it before we go," and she whirled round suddenly with her new guide, who led them by a swift turning straight to the open space and the sundial.

Dudley looked at the dial as he might look at any other ordinary object, for the thing had no great interest in itself. Dimly, too, he was wondering how his cousin, with her extraordinary look of breeding, should be at once so perfectly at home with a rather ragged labourer.

"There is such a curious inscription," said Linda. "You ought just to look at it." She climbed the steps, and Dudley went with her. The inscription not only did not interest him, but, as he knew no Italian, he could not decipher it. Linda in the sunshine was quite another matter—he hardly liked to look at her. She turned abruptly.

"Of course," she said—"you can't understand it." Then she translated slowly: "I mark the hours thus—but those ones never more." She turned and looked right into his eyes. The labourer had caught sight of his wife in the cottage on the hill above, and was waving to her with a sort of childish glee.

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"Never more," she repeated. And then, by a sort of odd intuitive instinct, that feeling which had frightened her so suddenly one morning in Venice only two days since became reversed. She began to laugh.

"Come, let us go; we are late," she said. "Run, run, run!" she cried to the labourer. He somehow caught her sense of gaiety and caprice, and he ran delightedly round on his paces and away through the paths of the maze. Dudley had need to alter his habitual stiff stride, and the three very soon emerged on the avenue which led straight up to the villa.

Here their guide bowed low with his hand on his heart. Italians are acutely sensitive, and Love was in the air.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE DANCING BEARS AND THE ENGLISHMAN

A CARRIAGE was drawn up by the front door, and on the back seat, a blue cotton handkerchief tied over his beaver hat, sat Don Pedro. There was no expression at all on his face. He had assumed his priest-like mask; his hands were clasped across his waist, and he looked like a lizard sitting quiet on a sunny wall, who yet at any moment might whisk its tail and scurry off again. He appeared not even to notice the hurried advent of Linda and her cousin; but Sebastian, on the other hand, began to upbraid them.

"Linda," he cried, "how can you keep one waiting so, and now when we were all ready to start, and poor Piero has been wasting his time this hour or more. Piero!" he cried with a wailing intonation in his voice, as he took the driver by the arm, "you must not be angry, and you must always wear this particular shirt when you come to take us for a drive. It is the colour of all the lagoons in May—or is it of a mountain lake? I never saw so beautiful a blouse. Wear it—wear it for my sake, Piero!"

Piero was a rather ordinary young country driver, with a slow and melancholy expression on his face. He wore a dusty grey coat and trousers, and under these a very blue cotton shirt which certainly was uncommon and attractive. Neither he nor his horse seemed to be in the smallest hurry. The horse was sleek and evidently a pet; some long feathers, torn from the tail of a cock pheasant, adorned the harness round his ears, and he had beautiful bells which jingled as he jerked his head occasionally in distress at flies.

Linda had gone to her room to fetch a wrap. Dudley, who was not particularly attracted by the company, sug-

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gested remaining at the villa, but Sebastian would not hear of this. "No, no, no," he cried, "we must all of us sink or rise together. Who knows what may not happen on our expedition! We are going to St. Elena to fetch sulphur-water—to bathe in sulphur baths. We will make tea in the carriage, or in some pleasant ditch. . . . Hurry, Linda. Come along, Dudley."

"Tea in a pleasant ditch!" thought Dudley. And who was to make it?—how irresponsible they all looked, and that brigand on the box, too! At least the worst brigand, the gondolier, was not to form one of the party.

"Very well," he said, and proceeded to take his seat by the coachman. Von Herder came hurrying from another quarter, and sat himself down beside Don Pedro. Linda arrived, and the over-crowded vehicle moved off along the even, sunlit road; it moved with all the quickness peculiar to hired Italian carriages. The horse seemed indifferent to its load, and they had soon left the hills of Cardinale far behind them, and were off upon the plains.

The heat of the day had passed. The sun was already on the downward path, and there was a curious warm stillness in the hedges. The acacia-trees were beginning to send forth the heavier fragrance of the night. Linda sat very quiet in her corner of the carriage. She was wearing the fantastic green veil selected for her by her uncle, but there was something of calm and placid enjoyment in her expression which harmonized with that of the nature all about them. Presently their carriage rattled over the cobble-stones of a village street: "Battaglia," cried Piero, and at that moment his horse gave a sudden leap and started aside, nearly capsizing the overloaded vehicle.

"Misericordia!" shouted Piero. "Animals—wild animals. Beasts of the accursed lands. Oh, Mother of mercies, have pity upon us."

"Hold his tongue for him!" muttered Dudley, quietly taking the reins and assuming command of the box. Von Herder jumped into the street, Sebastian followed him, but Don Pedro never altered his position.

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"Englishmen!" he muttered. "If one makes a voyage with the men of Great Britain, what may one expect but misery and scandal." He drew the blue cotton handkerchief a little farther over his hat, and then he clasped his hands upon his breast and closed his eyes.

Linda had darted up from her seat and was looking eagerly to find out the cause of the tumult.

Their road had taken a sudden turn into the square of the little town, and thus they had come full and unexpectedly upon a party of vagabonds. Two huge but emaciated bears, standing on their hind-legs, were revolving slowly, goaded by their keepers, in a small circle. They were covered with dust after a long tramp, muzzled, and confined by heavy ropes, and in every way pathetic; yet they had a sort of horrible and threatening appearance, which would attract an ignorant multitude, and the people of the sleepy little town had assembled in a crowd to behold them.

"It is disgusting!" said Dudley from the box. Linda was standing up beside him, a host of mixed feelings in her eyes.

"Something must be done," she said.

"Done?" inquired Dudley, in grim surprise.

"Yes—they are hungry, they are thirsty, they are most cruelly treated. They are dancing because they are goaded to it; they are wretched—utterly wretched!"

Von Herder seemed to be "doing something." He had entered into a lively talk with one of the keepers, and now he came hurrying back to the carriage:

"This *is* a treat," he cried—"something quite new. They refuse to sell me the bears as I wanted, but they will come to-night to Cardinale; we will have a perfect festa. Think what a joy for the village! We can buy a lot of paper lanterns in St. Elena and illuminate the garden, and then the bears will dance—we will all of us dance—a regular show it will be in those villa gardens! Something entirely strange and new!"

Linda shot a look of horror and of scorn on the speaker.

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"Make the bears dance?—but it is the most cruel and horrible spectacle. I would sooner see them *dead*," she exclaimed.

At this moment the bears, as though participating in her sympathy, wheeled suddenly round and began advancing towards the carriage. The crowd made way for them; one of them gave a long low wail or groan as he walked, and his paws waved feebly as though weary and fevered.

Sebastian and von Herder had mingled with the crowd. Don Pedro, with his back to the horse, had so completely covered his face as to be unable, as it seemed, to notice anything of the outer world.

"The poor brutes!" said Dudley, with the pity and disgust one might have expected from him. Linda was almost crying by this time. "Never mind, Linda, give 'em something to eat and then we'll be off."

Linda, indeed, had pulled out the tea-basket and extracted a large panetone or Easter-cake. Although Don Pedro seemed blind to events, he had fully grasped the entire situation, and, noting her action, he suddenly roused himself and spoke like an ordinary and angry man: "What are you doing," he cried, "disturbing our meal? Do you propose to feed beasts—bears, too—with Easter-cake?"

"Yes—every bit of it I mean them to have!" said Linda, hastily breaking the beautiful raisined loaf.

"But you are mad!"

"It is you who are mad to think even of not feeding them," she replied, and, a little afraid of the bears, she threw a large slice towards them.

Don Pedro seemed thoroughly roused. "But they are animals," he cried, "they are not Christians!"

Animals or Christians, the poor hungry creatures were not to get their meal; their keepers darted forward, seized the cake, and almost ravenously began to devour it themselves, whilst they goaded their charges to further antics.

By this time Sebastian had returned to the carriage. "Alas! alas!" he said, taking up his heavy volume, "here

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is the whole spectacle of humanity in a nutshell: Man has muzzled the beast which would kill him if for one instant he relaxed his hold of him. It is all merely a matter of the degree of tyranny. Sentiment—that is you, Linda, or any other woman—interferes, helps nothing, but only reveals fresh degradation; the artist," he signed to von Herder who was still delightedly mixing with the crowd, "looks on; the priest exhorts, but quite fruitlessly; and the other specimen of modern civilization—the Englishman of action—*acts!*"

Sebastian waved his hand to the bears, and there indeed was Dudley, who, with a sort of silent disgust, had left the box, joined the animals, and was quietly extracting from the muzzle of the one who looked most exhausted a sharp nail which, purposely, or otherwise, was inverted from the leather and galling the tender skin between the eyes. He did it with a total disregard of the people about him; then he put the nail, when extracted, into his pocket, came back to the box, and motioned to Piero to drive quietly forward.

They had been too long delayed, so they never bathed in the sulphur waters of St. Elena; but they drove on out of the town, and then they stopped and made their tea in a ditch as Sebastian had promised, and it was a very good tea and a lively one. Sebastian understood very well about that sort of thing. Von Herder's mood was gay to extravagance, and Linda was wild with a sudden pleasure. To her every incident appeared a joke, and, as the evening advanced, she felt almost hysterical. Her eyes shone, and as the sun set lower on the horizon's line it seemed to enter her very pupils and to fill her face with a radiant, wilful glory. And as this happened Dudley became curiously silent, almost moody; he did not appear to be watching her, but all unconsciously his mind was absorbed in her presence. Some seed, sown in his boyhood, came into sudden life and shot up as miraculously and as imperiously as did the waving corn about them.

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Once there was a little brown girl with great serious eyes who had come into the midst of an ordinary public-school-boy existence unbidden, not much noticed, but very much alive and unconsciously attracting. All that was long ago. A young man's life of a perfectly wholesome, entirely clean and upright, but curiously unmarked and unemotional order, lay between them. As Dudley sat on the bank with his pipe in his mouth, little forgotten thoughts came forth from some deep hidden portion of his nature; they connected themselves, dissolved, and reappeared; they all pointed to, they all spelled, one thing: a little brown girl; a radiant, mocking, yet all-appealing girl again; Linda, this creature with a fantastic, unfashionable hat and veil—a creature with eyes which haunted one even when they were not looking at one. . . .

"Art for art's sake——!" said Sebastian. "What cant. What folly! . . . I tell you it would be practically impossible to paint, and wholly impossible to wear, precisely that shade of blue in an English garden. Even if I did ask Piero to give me the blouse, it would lose all quality and all sense at Coneyhurst——"

Dudley only dimly heard the scattered words of his uncle and his uncle's friend across the hedge. Blue shirts and Coneyhurst, . . . why, it was a question of how the pheasants had sat. . . . But there were times when this same cousin came to Coneyhurst. She would be coming there again soon.. And the pheasants—— His heart gave a sudden thud.

"It's time to be off," said Sebastian. Linda came down the bank. She took her seat; the sun was at her back now, and the light lay all on the green gauze veil. Dudley shut the carriage door. "Haven't you got a wrap, Linda?" he asked. His eyes were blue—bluer than Giuseppe's blouse.

"I never wrap myself up," she answered.

Bald indeed were the words—but they were already those of lovers.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE PICTURE OF ENDYMION

THE shadows were already closing in as the party trundled slowly, for the horse was weary now, along the homeward road. On the plain, thin, almost imperceptible mists arose above the ditches. All around, for miles and miles, the green tree-frogs began to croak, singly at first, and then in fullest chorus. The leaves on the acacia-trees closed up like small umbrellas; earth was preparing for the night. The dew fell heavy, laying the dust on the roads. Sebastian and von Herder ceased to talk. In Linda's eyes a light of some new thing appeared to shine. She noted the changes of the inanimate things around her with her outward eyes, but her heart meanwhile was singing. Singing of what?

The heart of the girl sang, it is certain, a song of no settled ceremony, but of some ancient emotion of the first woman in nature—or also perhaps that of the flower which opens its petals to the hot May morning sunlight. Everything about her confirmed the pleasurable sensation, and she allowed herself to follow it blindly; she never attempted so much as to check it.

A light was twinkling here and there in the village of Cardinale. There was one in Don Pedro's house, too. The carriage stopped, and with a groan and a scowl the owner arose from his seat, turned to his companions with a certain covert scorn, and passed in silence by the privet-hedge, closing the door behind him. As the rest of the party approached the villa they became aware of some

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unusual disturbance. There was a general bustle—lights were being carried from room to room, there was a good deal of shouting, and a carriage and a cart piled with most respectable luggage was drawn up by the steps on which Giuseppe, in his shirt-sleeves, stood, frantically gesticulating to the drivers.

"Porco della Madonna!" he screamed when he noticed his master. "They have arrived. Your family is arrived, and nothing, nothing at all is prepared for them—no beds, no supper, no fish, no eggs, no beef. No beef!" he wailed, "and this great milord Inglese wanting his beef! Oh, mother of misery!—how to deal with such an affair! Che disgrazia!"

Even Sebastian looked a little grave. "It's my sister," he explained, "and to arrive without any warning—— She has mistaken the week; she always does. The thing is incorrigible. Well, we must face it." He arose from a pile of rugs and baskets, von Herder and Dudley followed, but Linda sat still a moment in the dusk.

At that particular instant it seemed to her that no conceivable disaster could possibly have been greater than that which had befallen; for, to her mind, her aunt's family represented everything which was cramping and conventional, and beyond the range of all genuine, still less of all artistic, emotion. Like a stiletto, the thought pierced to her brain that he who had stood in the sunlight on the piazza that May morning outside the wistaria curtain was not any detached figure of manhood, but the son, the nephew, the cousin, of cramping, rich, respectable "county" people. What had such a formal tiresome life to do with hers? What had she been dreaming about these days and weeks in Italy? What was it which somehow had filled her nature to the point of breaking? Was it only a dream, and was she from some sheer necessity to come back to all the other things, and were they the realities? And then her aunt and her cousin Susan—they were all up there, they were actually swarming within,

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contaminating, with their dreary presence, the almost sacred walls of this fantastic villa where she had hoped to go on dreaming.

"Signorina," said the driver, touching her shoulder. "I must ask you to be cruel enough to dismount from my carriage."

Linda shook herself together. She rose from her seat; she stumbled up the steps, and entered the great hall of the villa where at midday, only eight hours since, she had waltzed with Count von Herder. At first the light dazzled her; for the gondoliers had lighted two tall paraffin lamps which had no shades, and the whole place seemed to have altered. Mrs. James was lying on the sofa; her husband was opening some letters by the table; Susan and an English butler were incongruously employed in searching the attics for various necessities of existence, such as baths and screens.

"You won't find them, you won't find anything," called Sebastian. "You will just have to pack and to go away again."

"So here is little Linda," said Mrs. James. "What a strange sort of hat, my dear!—I cannot see your face."

Linda took off the hat by some force of habit, and bent to kiss her aunt's cheek. Mrs. James had always been very kind to her. Mrs. James was a charming little lady, and Linda was fond of her.

"Oh, you look just the same as ever," said Mrs. James. "There, dear, I should like to be quite quiet, if you don't mind, for just a little time before dinner, so run away quickly. I shall see you at dinner-time, and remember to put on a pretty frock for me—you and I are fond of pretty frocks?"

Linda's blood ran cold. "Just the same!" But she felt fathoms and fathoms above the surface of her old self. She felt like some wonderful plant, grown in the shade and suddenly reaching the sunlight. She could hardly remember her old personality—that of the peasant-child who was to be "moulded into shape" in an English home;

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and the recollection of an atmosphere which now was grown repugnant returned and almost stifled her.

"A pretty frock." Somehow these words at the moment appealed to her, but for reasons totally apart from her aunt. She left the lighted room and passed up into her own vast, mouldering bedroom. The maid had lighted two candles in front of one of the huge phantasmal mirrors, and had put out her one evening gown, made of the purest silk and coloured like a bright pomegranate flower. The skin of the young girl's throat looked dazzling as she put it on, and she twisted the heavy plaits of her hair to an advantage which she could never have dreamed of two weeks since. The maid at that moment knocked at the door.

"See!" she cried. "I have found the loveliest gem for our signorina," and she put on the marble table beside her a spray of the double pomegranate flower which had grown in a sheltered frame of the orange-house. "Over your left ear—thus," said the maid, who had the inborn eye of the artist. "Ah, Madonna!—what a lady!—what a sposa!" she cried, stepping back and clasping her hands in sheer delight at the sight of the beautiful girl. Linda stood up to her fullest height. She looked at her face, she looked over her shoulder into the opposite glass, and she saw that she was curiously, almost fantastically beautiful. There was something new about her beauty, something noble, mysterious, queenly. Outside the window, all along the great cypress avenue, the fireflies were coursing and dancing in the shadow. She saw them, and she went and leaned across the window-ledge. Everything that evening seemed to be calling to her and to her only—over and over again.

Then she put out her light and went down the passage into the hall. Only Dudley was standing there as she entered. He had put on evening dress, and was feeling a little bit cross; but when Linda came into the light a curious pang made him start—something called in his nature which had called whole centuries since when his

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ancestors lived in the caves of Great Britain, and combed their hair on holidays with combs made out of elk-horn; and when men simply stretched out their hands and "took" their women.

The man was here and the woman.

Dudley did not speak, but he went and turned down one of the lamps which was smoking. Linda watched him.

"There are thousands and millions of fireflies," she said, "out there—outside—up under the cypress avenue which leads by the shrines and the chapel. And you hear the frogs, of course?—they are tree-frogs—green ones, you know; they lie quite flat on the tree-trunks all the daytime, but at night they sing in a chorus. I don't know—somehow it seems to me—music," she said.

Dudley was looking at her with an odd, arrested look; there was a little frown on his forehead. His hands were behind his back as though to warm at the wood fire, which, in spite of the hot May night, had been lighted for Mrs. James.

Von Herder did not come in to dinner, but Sebastian was there in an old velvet coat. Mr. James looked very much out of place, but the ripened beauty of his wife's niece arrested his attention, and he even began to make jokes with her, and to watch her with a sort of admiring amusement. Susan wore her stiff white cotton travelling blouse. "To dress in a place of this sort would be absurd," she said decisively, and glanced at her handsome brother and at her bewildering cousin too with unveiled disapproval.

Dinner over, they left the hall and passed to the little-used drawing-room. The floor was of scagliola. A set of gilt chairs and sofas, covered with faded crimson satin, stood at stated intervals. There were large and not ill-painted canvases upon the walls, for here the loves of the gods had been almost brutally depicted by some late disciple of Veronese. Mrs. James had got hold of Linda by the arm, and went flitting round the room with her. "I like your frock, my dear," she said, "and I think you are look-

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ing very pretty. Do you know I am quite enjoying this funny rustic life? Wasn't the dinner delicious? Don't tell Susan, but I took another little piece of the cheese and tomatoes; I liked to ask that handsome Italian to give it to me, but I am quite a little afraid of him. Don't you think he might stick a knife into somebody, perhaps, some day?" Mrs. James pulled her niece nearer to her and shivered; then she began to flit round the room again. "Dear, dear," she said, "what pictures! But, Linda—do you think they are really quite nice—quite, quite what they should be? The ladies have hardly any clothes on at all—and, oh dear me! shan't we sit in the other room, perhaps?"

They had come to a standstill in front of a large sprawling figure of Endymion. The moon was very near him on the bare hillside. Linda's mind was elsewhere. She saw the curious and splendid limbs depicted on the walls, but they did not really interest her. She heard her aunt's childish prattle with a certain pleasure because the child was present in it, and Love likes childish things. But Linda was not thinking about her aunt.

The night was calling her—all the seething, sounding, pulsing night of May. The hills were there, outside the window, with their amazing hidden magic. As if by instinct she felt that the moon was up over the hornbeam alley just for her sake—just for her, too. She wanted to run; she wanted to run through the alleys away and alone. She wanted to understand, to feel, to *be* . . .

"After all it is only a picture," her aunt prattled on; "and do you know, of course you won't tell anybody, but I, myself, always thought that the moon was a little flirt! I think I should have liked Endymion at once; I should never have left him wandering on that horrid cold hillside. What do you think yourself, Linda—what would you have done?"

Unconsciously, almost, Linda turned, and she saw the face of Endymion, and it reminded her forcibly of some-

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thing, of someone she had forgotten. Was Basil out on the hills alone? She shuddered. "If you do not mind," she said, "I think I should like to go out for a little while."

"Out!" cried her aunt, "but we are in Italy; there is fever—one does not go out at night—and . . ."

Linda did not listen. She was away in the passage and down the stairs. She had passed through the wooden door at the back of the great courtyard; she had gathered up her red silk skirt, and she was running as fast as ever she could up the hillside behind her. It was a steep, stone-paved path which led between rows of cypress-trees to the little pilgrim's shrine on the top of the hill. The moon was up in all her splendour—a large spring moon which cast white lights over the plains behind, and down into the lawns and courts and spaces of the garden.

Linda sat down a second, to breathe, on the ledge of one of the flights of steps which led to a shrine. The moon fell on her bare neck and arms, and lighted the crimson silk of her dress, and caught at the pomegranate flowers in her hair. The moonlight felt to her warm—it penetrated her skin. Fever, indeed—no, we catch no fevers in moments of exultation! She clasped her hands and she gave herself back to the glory of the night. She became a living part of all the things about her, and she smiled.

She drew from her arm the long black scarf she had taken up as she crossed through the hall. She put it round her neck, stood up, and began to walk back very slowly down the hill-path.

Presently she came out into the quieter spaces of the moonlight, and passing round a bend of the villa, she emerged once more by the ponds. Here, once again, was a sumptuous scene of human luxury and ingenuity. Here nature had been tamed, ennobled, and then passed back into something even better and best of all—a cultivated abandonment. Linda paused by the ponds. The moon was so clear; it was like, or better than, the daylight. She leaned on the broad marble parapet and looked down into

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the depths of the quiet waters. She saw the reflection of her naked neck, her rounded, delicate, girlish arms. Her eyes looked cavernous, passionate, and immense, framed in the clouds of her hair.

"Linda! Linda!" called a voice from the villa. It was the voice of Mrs. James: "Come in, darling; where are you? Remember the fever. Dudley, where is Linda? Do go out and look for her. Call her for me. Tell her it is poison out in the garden at night, and in Italy!"

Dudley was out on the loggia; he had been there all the time. A stifling wish to follow Linda had long been overpowering him, but with the restraint of the trained soldier he had succeeded in smothering it.

"Oh, mother, don't worry," he answered. "She'll come in right enough."

"But indeed she won't, Dudley. You know nothing at all about Linda! Poor Mary's child! She's so very like her mother, and her mother died—greatly because of this same sort of rashness and romance. You know how she persisted in marrying the peasant? How can you know anything at all about Linda! I am sure it is very tiresome for you, but just for my sake go and fetch the child."

Then Dudley got up. He felt at that moment that his mother was utterly wrong. He felt that the one and only thing on all the earth he knew about was *Linda*. From his seat on the pergola he had watched her every movement since she entered the garden. He went down the stairs very slowly, he only asked to hurry down the stairs and to reach her, but he did not hurry. He took from a peg in the hall his own loose overcoat; he crossed the garden and he went to the ponds.

"Mother wants you to come in, Linda," he said; and he began to put the coat about her. "It's fever she's afraid of," he said.

"What fever?"

"Oh, the Italian fever."

"I'm sick of the very sound of it," the girl replied.

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"There *is* no fever—I mean, when one is happy and thinking of other things, then there's no fever!"

He did not answer. "Well, shall we come in?" he said; but it was impossible for him to conceal his reluctance.

They had reached the pergola by now, which ran all the length of the ground floor of the villa. Here the moonlight entered only in flecks and patches, as the creepers were already in leaf.

"We might stop a little here," said Dudley. "It's stuffy in the house. Won't you put the coat right on?"

Linda slipped her arms into the coat.

"How big you must be!" she said. "I'm lost in it."

"I think you look awfully jolly like that," he hazarded.

"What I really like," said Linda, "what I want to see, is the open country here. Think of the ditches in the early morning! There are lots of lilies in them—I saw them as we drove along, I saw it all; but we did not stop to pick them. I'd like to pick and pick them. And then there are the water-snakes. They swim. Nobody can swim like a water-snake—not even you. And frogs; lots of little tree-frogs. If you look on the trunks of the mulberries and willows you will see one sitting on almost every trunk. And there's a bird with a voice like a circular saw till he is really singing—and after that it's music. Brown and grey he is, that particular bird. They build in the rushes. I would like to find their nest."

"I'd like to help you look," he interrupted. Her clear and curious voice, harping on rather inconsequent things, fascinated him. It seemed to mesmerize him. He wished he had not spoken to interrupt her.

"No," she said, "no, they're happy—I mean, the birds. And why disturb them?"

"Why are you talking about the birds? They've finished building," he said.

"I don't know," she said. She stood with her head turned away from him. In all her life she had never felt

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like this, and yet she remembered her old self well. She stood in the moonlight—just a slip of a girl with no experience, no precise endeavour or discipline; yet to him who had always lived under a rather narrow training, her being seemed at that moment vast, mysterious—full of an endless history.

He watched her, till she turned to him again.

"And besides all the things outside the garden, there are other things quite as delightful in it, too. Don't you smell the flowers of the vines? Their scent is almost stifling."

"No," he said, "I had not noticed the vines." His head was aching with the strong scent of the Italian night air, but he had not considered the separate causes.

"You don't notice much, then?" she said, returning to the banter of their childhood.

"No," he said dully, "perhaps I don't. I think most awfully slowly—I'm not like you. . . . But why not tell me some more, though," he said.

"More what?"

"Oh, more about anything—all the things you were saying before: birds, and lilies, and the snakes in the ditches. . . . Linda, you know yourself what you were telling me."

"No," she said, "I don't think I do."

"Well, then," he said, "why not go together to the ditches in the morning? I might be able to get you the things—to pull up the lilies—to——"

"Oh yes," she said to herself, "you might do many things."

She went to the marble pillar of the pergola and touched it with her fingers. Her soul and body seemed suddenly all aflame; the little tendrils of the vine caught in her hair and tired her. There was a warm, still heaviness about the Italian night air, but no mist or sense of actual moisture. The heavens were unclouded, the light of the moon had hidden the stars, but in the borders and the alleys the

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fireflies flitted and flickered like living points of light. The place seemed laden with the pantings of innumerable flowering shrubs—allspice, syringa, and Maréchal Niel roses. In the distant copses all up the hillside, nightingales were singing in shrill piercing trills their songs of love and May.

Suddenly the girl felt chilled. Was she really a nun at heart? Tears came to her eyes—she had not really cried before in Italy. The thing had come which she had dreamed of all these weeks, and the thing was pain. Wearily she turned towards the lights in the hall.

Susan was playing a song of Mendelssohn's up in the bigger drawing-room, and Mrs. James had gone back to the picture of Endymion. She darted towards the pair as they entered.

"Ah, so you've brought back Linda! So silly of you, darling, to risk a fever—and then there is just one more thing I wanted to tell you about Endymion."

Dudley was left standing alone; his tall and splendid figure seemed to stiffen. The picture was different, grown browner. Linda went out on the balcony and picked a flower of the vine and brought it back to Dudley.

"I brought you the flower of the vine," she said. "You will see it is very sweet."

"Are you going to the ditches to-morrow?" he asked, and his voice sounded husky and strained.

"Yes," she said, quite slowly, "I think we will go whilst it's cool."

He turned to her suddenly to take the flower; his fingers touched her own. She prayed, she knew not why.

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CHAPTER XXIV

FIRST LOVES

AT six o'clock the following morning Dudley stood on the terrace. A second later Linda had joined him; she had tied her green veil in a rather curious knot below her hat at the back of her neck; she was fresh and cool, but he had scarcely slept, and there was a new eagerness about his face and manner.

"Is it good for you to take a walk in all this heat?" he asked abruptly.

"Everything is good for me," she said—"everything, I mean, that I like to do," she added, and she looked up into his face.

He was bending towards her, waiting and wishing for the meeting of their eyes. A tiny tingling shiver quivered for a second in her eyelids, contracted her nostrils, and parted her lips, then passed through her finger-tips. She stayed not to wonder, but acted on impulse, and spoke with her usual precipitate candour:

"Dudley," she said, "how you have changed!" and she watched the young man's handsome face as though afraid to find a fault there. "I mean, you were just an ordinary English schoolboy—and now—I could almost have thought you were not the same person," she added.

"You're the same," he stammered, "at least, the same—and then something quite different as well."

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I didn't think so. Do you think so, really?"

"Yes—well, it doesn't matter, anyway."

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She turned her eyes with a sort of benign candour upon him. "I am altogether different," she said. "I used to despise and yet almost to adore you, too, when I was a child. And, now, now. . . ." She stopped, but there was all her admiration in her eyes.

He looked back at her with a delighted amazement. The vivacity of the little girl had always unconsciously held him in boyhood; the same thing, now that she was grown to womanhood, heated and overwhelmed him. He flushed up crimson.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"To see about the birds and the lilies in the ditches."

Then they went from the garden, and out through the deserted village street along the road.

"Look here," he said at last, "you didn't really mean what you were saying just now. So why did you say it?"

"It's just that I *do* mean it," she replied; and at the moment, somehow, her mind wandered freely to the lines of willow-trees ahead, where she knew the desired flowers were growing. She seemed as though she were two distinct people—the one who talked and the one who saw. "I used to wonder about you, Dudley. English boys and Swiss boys—you see, they are very different. But now I don't wonder any more about it. I'm only glad you were my friend when we were children, because now that I know you—now that I like you . . ."

She broke off. A water-bird had started from the rushes and flown across their path.

"Yes," he said, "yes?" But she had gone in pursuit of the bird.

"Give me a flower," he said as she returned to him. She went again to the water's edge and sought amongst the grasses, but there was nothing which would do for the finished simplicity of the young English officer. "It won't do," she said. "There's nothing here will do for you. Count von Herder would love the nightshade," she added. "But I—I would not like you to wear it."

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"Is Count von Herder out of favour?" stammered Dudley.

"Everybody—everything," she said, and her face was flooded with delight. She was in among the rushes now, bending towards the water-lilies with which the ditch was full.

"Linda," he said, "I don't understand you, perhaps! But——" He was silent; and the sudden strangeness of their contact filled with a wonderful contentment these two so totally different beings.

They stretched for the lilies, sitting in the full May sunlight side by side.

"And you've been in Italy all alone? I mean, before I came?"

"Yes," she said, "I was alone—I mean in that way—but I was very happy."

It seemed to her she was happy now—as though she had never felt a moment's sadness or a thought of pain or of perplexity; as though the sunlight, which now encompassed her mental as well as her physical being, had always surrounded her . . . as though Dudley had always been close to her, and this joy in his presence were no new thing, but just the accustomed possession.

He had taken her hand, and was looking at her slender, sun-burned fingers. "Linda——" he said.

A cart was coming along the road and in it was a priest's black coat and a blue cotton handkerchief. Linda rose to her feet. "It is time to be going," she said. She gathered up her lilies. "Don Pedro might give us a lift," she said, and her hand was free from Dudley and waving above to the cart. But Don Pedro appeared unconscious of their presence till the girl called shrilly to him.

"Room for one, room for one. Englishmen and dogs walk in the sun," he murmured. "Get up, little miss—don't keep me waiting." So Linda got up and sat on the

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seat by the priest, whilst Dudley walked home in the sunlight.

The very same day Mr. and Mrs. James decided that life in a partially-furnished Italian villa was quite impossible, and they determined to move on the following day to Venice. No one regretted the decision, except, perhaps, Dudley and Linda. He knew that it would be expected of him to join his parents, or even to accompany them, and his position was rendered the more complicated because Linda had openly avowed not only her intention, but her right, to remain at the villa. Mrs. James kept Linda close beside her all the day. She dimly detected something a little "harum-scarum" in her niece's position; but recognizing parental authority at the back of it, she could only advise and not interfere. The subject of Endymion was dropped; that of "coming out," and the duties and habits suitable to young ladies, was a good deal described; also a smattering of Venetian art, and the possible ransacking of old furniture-shops in back-streets; and there was a desperate question as to whether a call on Frau Castelberg would be "suitable," or the reverse. To all these things Linda, who now was thoroughly in love and yet herself bewildered, lent a deaf ear. Sebastian avoided his sister; it was not to her judgment that he intended to confide himself.

The day seemed interminable. Towards evening a heavy storm gathered and broke, and a hot rain dripped through the pergola; so all question of being out of doors soon vanished. The evening, too, was very constrained. Whist was proposed, and Dudley was asked to join a rubber. Von Herder, bored and appalled by his milieu, had vanished early in the afternoon; Linda and Mrs. James were once again thrown into each other's company, and they found themselves sitting on the crimson silk cushions of the divan, immediately under the fresco of Endymion. Something deep down, pagan, and unsuspected in the exquisite little lady again woke up to torment her.

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"You remember, dear Linda, what I said about Endymion—about Endymion and the moon? Well, do you know, I sometimes think that nearly all women are little flirts? I know that I flirted with your uncle once. And then afterwards—well—sometimes it's all very, very, very dull—*afterwards*, I mean."

"I see," said Linda. But she was not really listening.

Dudley had played his ace to his partner's king; his eyes had fixed themselves on the silk divan. How unlike his mother and his cousin were! Would he, too, be able to find such silks for Linda to wear—silk "the colour of a pomegranate flower," she had said it was. His mother's dress was the colour of an exquisite shell, the inside ear of an oyster. His mother knew all about life, and she had long outlived the wild, fantastic tastes of her niece—and yet? Oh, but Linda, too, would age in time, and wear a gown the colour of an oyster, and perhaps just a flower of pomegranate to remind him of the past.

"Dudley! your ace to my king!" almost thundered the astounded Mr. James.

"Forgive me," said his son. But almost within five minutes he revoked. His father was stern; the game was up. The evening was generally admitted to have proved a fiasco, and the parting the following morning constrained. There was a sense of mischief in the air—Bohemia invaded and desecrated; Philistia failing in its sense of a fitting romance.

"Good-bye, Linda," said Dudley, standing bareheaded and humble before her. "Mother wanted me in Venice, you see; I haven't been with her for over two years. But . . ."

Linda knew nothing at all of the world. She was surprised, she was angry. She did not speak, and she held her head up high.

"Linda, if you'll let me, I want to come back—that's what I mean—may I come back?"

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She did not answer. She was hurt at his going—horrified almost; she never expected it.

"I've been looking up trains—I can get here and back quite easy even after lunch—I mean if you'll let me?"

Again she did not answer. She was only a child, and would have cried had she spoken. She kissed her aunt and her uncle, and Susan, and long after the carriage had driven away she stood on the doorstep watching the road. Then she ran up to her bedroom and locked herself in. Was she sad—was she angry? Who shall say.

Her friends at the villa were men of tact; they packed up some lunch and they left her, for the day, alone. Linda had often been alone. But she felt more absolutely and completely alone—she felt alone because she felt forsaken—than she had ever done in the whole of her existence before. She cried at first angrily; then she cried quietly; then she began to think. And her thoughts were perfectly clear this time: she wanted Dudley. She wanted him with the whole of her nature. She wanted him that moment and for that moment; she was not thinking of the future, but of to-day—to-day. Why was he gone, gone from beside her, he who had only just come back to her? And he needed her, too—of that she was positive! . . . This thought came second and brought relief. He needed her, too; she ceased to sob; she rose from her knees and she opened the shutters. The air was fresh from the cool of the night; she bathed her eyes, she walked down the stairs, and all through the rooms and out on the pergola. An old leather pouch for tobacco lay on a table; it belonged to Dudley; she touched it with her fingers and then she felt better. He needed her, too. She fetched an envelope and put the pouch inside it, then she directed it to the Venetian address he had given her, and she went down the street and posted it. She had not written, but he would see her writing. Would he write, would he come? . . .

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CHAPTER XXV

THE WISDOM OF SEBASTIAN

THE following day Sebastian determined to speak to his niece. Sebastian had a genial custom of letting matters slide till what he considered to be the proper psychological moment. He now felt that it was time to act; nothing had escaped his notice, and he had accurately summed up the whole situation. He knew quite well how many small and inconsequent things combine to produce results in human affairs, and perhaps he gauged his own comparative impotence in this particular one, where the impulse of youth and the onrush of the human heart, as things quite away from the sterner realities of later life, were alone engaged. Still, his own view of the situation was definite enough, for which of us is not a match-maker? Long years ago Sebastian had made a match for the niece he loved, and this match seemed likely to vanish into thin air.

Soon after lunch he sent for Linda. He had selected for his seat of judgment a large, almost barn-like room, in the front of the house overlooking the garden. He sat in a huge medieval chair, the possession of the cardinal who long, long years ago had built the villa, leaving his worldly track upon it. Sebastian twiddled the loose wooden rings, so ingeniously encircling the arms on his chair that one wondered how they ever had come there. Linda he had begged to be seated just opposite him with her face in the shade, for he wished not to see her suffer pain, and he knew he was going to hurt her. His own face, white and shadowed by the hundred conflicting emotions of one to

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whom life, by force of physical circumstances, was a pageant rather than a living drama, caught the light full as it fell through the half-open shutters from the garden beyond.

"Listen, Linda," he said. "I want you to draw yourself together. We must talk. A thing of this sort cannot drift—it's a real question—a question of life and of death, if you think of it. It is everything that ever was from the very beginning, Linda." He leaned forward, and with his thin nervous hands, which were usually hot and dry like those of someone who is frail and ill, and yet of a curious breadth and strength, he took her own, which seemed to shiver away from their grasp. "Linda," he said, "a marriage of this sort is really a sort of pit. It is not a ladder, as some would suppose. You fall *into* it, you do not climb up *by* it. You may find, perhaps, a beautiful place when you reach the bottom, but it never is, it can never be, the sky. What you are now vaguely allowing yourself to drift into is, at best, but the gratification of some preconceived emotion. It is not a necessity, it never could be a permanent reality."

"But——" interposed Linda.

"There is no 'but.' You have fallen in love with your cousin Dudley, and he has fallen in love with you. But man and woman—no, that you two could never be; I mean, you two could never, by the remotest possibility, succeed in becoming man and wife in the highest ideal of those words. Man and woman!" Sebastian paused, and he seemed to draw in his breath and his pupils contracted, for he too had dreamed his dreams. "Oh, Linda dear, that is glorious, and has been known even upon this exhausted earth—though what has come of it Heaven only knows, for the gods have never been born of mortals. But you, with your wonderful past—I mean, with your father's blood in your veins——"

Linda shivered. Was even Sebastian, who did "under-

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stand" things, off himself on the old perpetual track and story!

"You, Linda, you cannot, not even by a million vagaries of circumstances, and by whole decades of self-control, you cannot become the woman who will sit by the side of Dudley James until death take either you or him."

Linda was staring now. A little something in her mind seemed to stir and to grow.

"Stop," she said, "don't talk to me like that. It is wrong—and then, I do want happiness."

"Happiness!" cried Sebastian. "My child, who is happy? Well, you yourself have the seeds in you of happiness—of a glorious fulfilment, that is to say. Listen, dear. You have seemed to me during these weeks down in Italy like a creature whom the gods might have chosen out to love. Once or twice I almost held my breath as I watched you. And then—I planned for you—— But Dudley! Dudley is *not* a god! He is beautiful to look at, but he is a James. He has no imagination. He will never go further. He's handsome and he's good, but he is bourgeois to his finger-nails—— He might even be a cad and a bully to his wife if ever she exposed him. I hurt you?"

Linda had started to her feet. A frightened look rather than one of anger was in her eyes; she stood with her hands hanging by her sides, and unconsciously her eyes sought the great mirror which hung over the entrance-door. Her back was to the light. Her lithe little figure stood dark against the outside sunshine in the garden; and she seemed like something which belonged to woody places, and to rocks where clear cold waters fall on the moss in summer days and freeze again on Christmas nights.

"Dudley can do two things," Sebastian continued in a slow, but even more penetrating voice; "if he marries he can go back to India and live the life of an English officer. I do not know whether you have read any books about the lives of English officers and their wives in India? No? Well, don't attempt to do so, if you can possibly avoid the

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subject, for they are not particularly attractive reading. Or—and this is more probable (for he is eminently an 'English gentleman,' and knows what is required of an English gentleman, especially of one with a young family)—he will either leave the service and conduct a well-regulated, but totally depressed life, in some small English house; or he will deposit his wife in a still smaller English house, and himself go backwards and forward to India. But, in any case, he never can or will or should do anything out of the commonplace bourgeois life. Some men can, but Dudley can't—it is not in his nature. He is very good-looking, and he has somehow fallen in love with you. But he is a dull man, and a dull man he will remain to the very end of his days—nothing can alter him."

Again Linda made a movement of revolt and escape. But Sebastian detained her.

"No, Linda, you shall listen to me. There are women—many of them—healthy, respectable, dreary young English-women; better set up in some ways, much more capable and far more responsible than you are; to whom this existence would be possible and even, perhaps, dimly pleasant, because they are asleep, and will remain asleep till we have shovelled the gravel into their graves. There are women, I say, who could be the happy wives of Dudley James; women who, indeed, would consent to submit to him all their days. But you, Linda, are not like one of these, you are not asleep. You are only in a passing dream; you would wake up—*you would soon wake up*, Linda."

Again there was almost an hysterical cry in the delicate voice of Sebastian. Again he caught her hand as though to draw her to him. "Marriage, Linda! Life in some dreary English town or village—with or without an English husband! But just try to think of it. . . . Rows and rows of houses, separate and detached; some with ivy over them, some with virginia creeper, some with neither—mostly all with bow-windows; and your neighbours—respectable but inquisitive women—women as hard and as

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inquisitive as peasant-women, but far more corrupt because they are idle, looking in at your windows—women with housemaids and parlour-maids, and cooks, all stewing together in what, after all, is the worst form of slavery and of barbarism—namely, a respectable mediocrity; women drinking tea, playing tennis. Those for your neighbours, day and night, night and day. And pavements and asphalt under your feet, and a walk to the butcher and the baker and the fishmonger. And the squarings of your poor little accounts, and the terror of a deficit, year in and year out. . . . Linda—are you listening?"

Linda was not listening. She had put a barrier between herself and the speaker; the same barrier that she had lately put between her own strong soul and her outward being; and she would not listen to Sebastian. But all the same her soul within was listening; and long years afterwards not only the meaning of the words, but their very syllables, came back to her, burning as only stings of truth can burn.

And, as she stood there, looking in the mirror where the whole of the garden outside was reflected, with its alleys, its fountains, and its moss-grown statues, she even smiled. For she was the centre of that gay and lovely pagan picture. Her lithe body, keen as that of some young panther, stood against the burning, teeming light of the Italian afternoon. The tiny curls escaped around her temples and made a crown about her head.

But that was not all that she saw in the mirror. She saw a figure enter the garden. Dudley had come, as he said that he would. Dudley was waiting downstairs in the garden. He, too, could see Linda at the window. He wanted her so. Why did she not come? What was she doing up there with his unaccountable uncle! He wanted her to come and to sit beside him—Linda, the little half-foreign cousin—the focus in his life which alone was perhaps unorderly; he wanted to have her beside him, to give him that something which he lacked, which his being somehow

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was awake to. He was in love with Linda, and he had never been really in love in all his life before.

He kicked at the gravel. What was she doing, Linda, all this time up there with his eccentric and impossible uncle? How uncertain they both of them were! Why didn't she come? She knew he was waiting. Why didn't she come? His heart literally thumped. He was a very strong, well-ordered, clean-living man; he wanted Linda more than he wanted to drive the ball between the goal-posts in the last match of his last term at Eton when he was captain of the school; he wanted her, indeed, much more than that, and this says much. He wanted her more than anything he had ever wanted in the whole of his previous existence. He had spoken no word of love to her, but his passion was in his hand; and he had taken her hand the morning before away down by the ditches. And her hand had stayed. How warm it was, how it seemed to respond and to quiver, that small brown hand! He wanted it back. . . .

Down in the inn outside the villa gates Count von Herder was playing on the piano—what was more, he was singing. Dudley, engrossed in his own cogitations, did not at first notice the music. Also, the inn faced more to the back of the house than that part of the garden where he happened to be standing. But von Herder had a habit of making himself heard; like many egoists, he anxiously desired to convey his own passions and emotions to others. How often had he sung to tease some bewildered kitchen-maid or scullion till the pans went flying, the menial not knowing why. Von Herder was infected by the spring. *His* spring-time long was over, but he narrowly, cynically, with a sort of bacchanalian abandonment, desired to cement its ravages for others. He was most keenly alive to the situation between Linda and her cousin; he felt no pleasure in it—he experienced, indeed, a sort of disdain; yet by every means in his fractious mind he determined to promote

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things. His humour for the moment was gay. From his bedroom-window up under the eaves of the little ramshackle inn, where one or two leaves of last year's vine still clung about the green and woolly tufts of May, he could trace what was happening in the villa. He could see Sebastian, pale and eager, putting aside his own pleasure and studies to talk common sense to his niece; he watched every movement in the big saloon; he could almost invent the very words of the speakers. He could see that Linda was startled, but not convinced; he could see that, though something in her soul was listening, her body and her mind were elsewhere; and then, just when an undesired crisis might have come—when she started to her feet disclaiming—then, at that vital point, to his inconsequent joy he noted the advent of Dudley down in the garden; and he could calculate that, though the girl's back was to the window, the figure of her lover was full on the mirror before her.

There was no time to spare. Seizing from his table a little volume of Latin student songs, he bounded downstairs to the hall of the inn, the doors of which stood open wide to the street and the villa outside it. Here stood a piano, the pride of the village, lately acquired from a sale at Padua, and by no means a bad instrument; von Herder himself had had it tuned. The moment was propitious. He set the book up before him. He struck a few chords tentatively and then he began to play.

All the trills and the quavers and the wayward frolic of May was here. A storm and a torrent of chords, and then a long low wailing note of demand, and of answer. All that the birds had done for a month—they were resting now—all the cicala had sung in the hedge—his young were hatched, he was grown silent—and the white acacia above which had given out her heavy indolent perfume—von Herder had caught all this in his playing. He knew very well what it all was about. Just once he glanced across to the villa. Linda had left her uncle; she had put on her hat and come out into the courtyard, where the oleanders

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stood in tubs, ready to burst into bloom; her hand was on the latch of the outer door which led to the lane and thence to the garden; she was listening, though her eyes looked far away. Then von Herder began to sing with a reckless and a frantic gaiety.

"Spring is coming—longed-for spring
Now his joy discloses;
On her fair brow in a ring
Bloom empurpled roses,"

he sang.

"Now let young men gather flowers,
On their foreheads bind them;
Maidens pluck them from the bowers,
Then, when they have twined them,
Breathe perfume from bud and bloom,
When young love reposes,
And into the meadow so
All together laughing go,
Crowned with ruddy roses.

"Cast aside dull books and thought;
Sweet is folly, sweet is play.
Take the pleasure Spring hath brought
In youth's opening holiday!
Right it is old age should ponder
On grave matters fraught with care;
Tender youth is free to wander,
Free to frolic light as air.
Like a dream our prime is flown,
Prisoned in a study;
Sport and folly are youth's own,
Tender youth and ruddy.

"Live we like the gods above:
This is wisdom, this is truth;
Chase the joys of tender love
In the leisure of our youth!
Keep the vows we swore together,
Lads, obey that ordinance;
Seek the fields in sunny weather
Where the laughing maidens dance.
Like a dream our youth is flown,
Prisoned in a study;
Sport and folly are youth's own,
Tender youth and ruddy."

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Linda had opened the courtyard door; she was out in the sunlight, but looking back. Then von Herder made a crash on the chords, and he turned to the song which students sing when they have buried one of their comrades. Did he think that Linda was going to her death? Aloes have strange ways of dying, and some have thought it is actually so with human beings.

Once again his voice was raised, and the words went shouting out to the sunlit street.

"Let us live, then, and be glad,
While young life's before us!
After youthful pastime had,
After old age hard and sad,
Earth will slumber o'er us.

"Where are they who in this world
'Ere we kept were keeping?
Go you to the gods above;
Go to hell; inquire thereof:
They are not—they're sleeping.

"Perish cares that pale and pine!
Perish envious blamers!
Die the Devil, thine and mine!
Die the starch-necked Philistine!
Scoffers and defamers!"

The piano-lid went down with a bang. Linda had passed from the lane and up into the woods beyond; Sebastian had run down the steps to the inn half angry, half excited.

"They were quite different times altogether," he said with emphasis. "They were wandering students, too, not respectable Englishmen and women."

"They were gods for the moment," said von Herder, "and if we are worth anything, you know very well, Crane, that we all are gods—once in our lives and once in the spring-time."

"Pagan gods, you mean," said Sebastian. "I have not been a god myself," he added curtly, but there was pain in his eyes. "And then, too, those particular songs belong to other times; they need the Latin they were sung in."

"It's not a question of language. You know that as well

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as I. It's a thing of the blood. They were merely expressing some movement of the blood. It's purely and simply a question of the amount of vitality."

"Well," said Sebastian, whose sympathies were always with the healthy human animal. "In this case, on one side, anyhow, the amount is limited by the strictest limits. And that is the precise crux of the whole situation."

"'There are other and fairer Galateas,'" von Herder quoted lightly. "I mean, of course, to reverse the gender in this particular instance."

"Yes—there are other and fairer and nobler Gataleas," almost wailed Sebastian. "But in any case Linda had better go home to her father. I can't be any longer responsible." He put on his large straw hat. He took his stick, and he and von Herder started off by the street door, one of them wholly unconscious of the second inmate of the garden. They were, both of them, agile walkers. They had taken a road which led to a little hamlet many miles away, where a great poet had lived and died. They passed through the copses of hazel, cool in the afternoon shadow, and as they went, Sebastian took from his pocket a little Apocrypha. He turned to some verses of the Song of Solomon, and, standing still, he chanted those marvellous stanzas of love written so many thousands of years ago by a Jewish singer:

"'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon! . . . For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of my companions? . . .' Ah, flocks—and kings! Ye gods! . . . 'to follow in the footsteps of the flocks, and feed the kids before the shepherds' tents!' This she should do—all this is before her. A man—half a god with the figure of a Greek inside his homespun. . . . And then this alternative—Dudley James, and an English dinner-table with paper shades!"

"And a body as Greek as any peasant's in Europe!—and without the homespun?"

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"I grant you the body. But all the rest! Oh, the flocks!—and then the poor little crumpled hearts withering and curling together like cataracts of dead leaves all over the suburban districts, and the crowded streets of our poor English cities. Even at this moment—this very moment, do you realize it, von Herder?—in the height and the glow of the May-time, behind their bow-windows and their frightful upholstered drawing-rooms. . . ."

"But your niece need not live in a suburb."

"My dear fellow, you know nothing at all about our family, nor about what will happen to Linda, if this fatality occurs. But you might at least have detected some of the abysmal depths of my family's apathy. We literally smell of the suburbs. We are tainted and dyed with them. We may, as individuals, sit on Parnassus for a season, but we return to our suburb. We have fine country houses, but we carry the suburb into them. . . . Why! Coneyhurst is papered and upholstered from attic to cellar by suburban shops. . . . 'Stay me with flagons.'" he went on reading, "'comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love.'"

They were high up among the brushwood now, on one of the lower spurs of the Euganean hills. Beyond them lay the plain, studded with white villas, villages, and scattered hamlets. The lagoon they could not see, for the heat of the glorious May-day, and of all the days which had gone before, "like a vaporous amethyst or an air-dissolved star," had filled the horizon with a seething, teeming haze, which mixed together sky and land till it seemed like a long belt of air-laden ocean. Already the crops had a shimmer of yellow; already on the very core of spring, autumn seemed to cast her shadow.

"There is nothing on the whole face of the earth," said Sebastian, "to compare for beauty with these points where mountains meet the plain. It is what the barbarians saw and coveted. Think of them coming down in their hordes, apoplectic with all the meat they had steadily eaten through countless generations, their brains sodden with fog and with

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food, their bodies hardened by the wearing of cow-hides—think of these people looking, suddenly, down on these sun-laden visions! Do you wonder they went almost mad with desire! They saw what they could not at all understand, but what they felt they could take and have for their very own. Think of some giant who had wallowed in a half-frozen swamp all his boyhood, looking of a sudden on this—on this!"

Sebastian, excited by some half-chaotic vision, had stretched himself full length on the turf which covered the little hillock where they stood. The wild thyme scented with aromatic intensity the air about him, exciting afresh the visions which teemed within his fevered brain. The transactions down in the villa had been to him harsh and strained. No one saw better than he the force of both sides of the case. No one loathed more deeply than he the intrusive rending by our sorry selves of the ordered plans of Nature; and he recognized, as one of Nature's forces, this falling in love of the cousins, and he loved such love more perhaps than most men, just because he himself was incapable of it. Still, he had been early tutored in what he called the "high school of bourgeoisie." He knew its abysmal depths of decaying dullness, he knew its power to *dwarf* which is only another form of corruption; and he had made and would make again the effort to save one whom he considered to be so far untainted by the stifling caresses of this teaching. For the moment, however, his duty was done, and he had returned whole-hearted to those subjects in which he himself had found in his boyhood an escape from his dreaded surroundings.

Count von Herder, on the other hand, who long had escaped from everything, or who perhaps had never been bound, was otherwise employed. He was standing on a small hillock, from whence he commanded a wide view of the panorama at their feet; but the lagoons and the plains with the former descent and doings of the barbarians had no particular attractions for him. It was the immediate

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foreground which occupied his attention. So straight before him, you could almost have dropped a pebble into one of their fountains, lay the gardens of Cardinale. The sun, which lay so warm on the hilltop still, had vanished from the deep volcanic cup where the villa stood. The tanks, the hornbeam avenues, the statues, and the mossy seats, were all in shade. A profound, a melancholy peace and stillness reigned over that romantic pleasaunce, wrapping it round with an almost magnetic calm. On a little stone bench by one of the tanks two figures were sitting. They each held a corner of the bench, and they did not seem to be speaking. There are few things to others more frightening or forlorn than the sight of lovers in a huge landscape when the sun is setting.

"Come, let us go—that is what your niece complains to me we elders are always saying," he cried to Sebastian, and they rose and went on towards Arqua.

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CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE GARDEN OF LOVE

"I laid me down upon a bank
When Love lay sleeping;
I heard among the rushes dank,
Weeping, weeping.

"I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A chapel was built in the midst
Where I used to play on the green.

"And the gates of the chapel were shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

"And I saw it was filled with graves
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires."

WILLIAM BLAKE.

LINDA went out by the gate in the courtyard and up by the hill behind. She did not go straight to the garden. It is rarely we go in quite a straight line to places where our hearts have gone before us, for, whilst still uncertain of our dreams, we are sure to delay about following them. And yet there was little time to lose. Nature's promptings are sharp enough in youth, and something strong in Linda's nature told her very certainly that the moment was here, that no other day would ever in the whole of her mortal existence be as to-day. The words and the reasonings of Sebastian could not be buried, and the stronger sides of her intricate double nature would assert themselves later; but for to-day

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she had smothered them. She paused, not irresolute, but merely waiting. There was a peasant's house let into the wall just above where she stood; the shutters were open and a woman was humming at her work within. A bird-cage hung in the window, and a little blind linnet was singing its heart out with a shower of treble notes against the bars. Linda did not notice that the bird was blind, as she might have done at any other moment. She merely heard the delicious singing, and to this something akin within her own breast responded. Beside the bird-cage stood a rude earthenware pot with a clove carnation growing in it; the plant was sickly enough, but it bore a couple of splendid blooms which glowed a deep maroon in the light. Linda glanced at the flower, and then a thing which was sudden, impulsive, and altogether wayward in her nature seemed to strike her. She opened a gate to the left which led back to the villa garden, and she passed from the shade of the lane into the glowing, teeming light within. She went very quickly down a grassy alley. An instinct stronger than her own soul seemed pushing and calling to her. The clove carnations belonged to the Past, and Linda was about to abandon her Past.

Just another walk or another talk, another clasping of the hands together. A sensation, an unreality? Dreams are unreal, yet our souls grow large in dreaming. No. Once more—once more! She and he alone together, a little frightened at each other's breathing, a little staggered by the sound their footsteps made upon the dead leaves in the grass. But the grass itself was green enough, and there was much more of it than there was of last year's leaves. Why listen to the rustle of things that were dead. To the carpings of Sebastian—to the dictates of some prehistoric conscience? All of these had seen and tasted life, and having done so, all others had followed on and done the same. Why not go out with the birds a-nesting? They lived, they sang their songs; in autumn they, like the leaves, would cease to love and sing. In winter they would starve.

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But spring comes round again as certainly as death, and in spring they would go courting as before.

Linda stopped in her walking. How dared she think like this? She could not honestly love Dudley, or she would never be reasoning in this fruitless fashion. She had come to the head of the garden, to a spot where the mountain stream is caught on its wayward courses and turned into its first marble channel before it enters the great tanks where the goldfish live beyond. The girl sat down on a little stone bench let into the mossy bank above the stream. On the opposite bank was a small stone figure of Cupid, naked and erect, wantonly shooting at air. He had lost his arrows and some of his curls, and there was a dissipated look about the little boy which made him infinitely attractive. By some fatality, or was it, perhaps, by dire intention, at a time years since, when his own gay pedestal had broken in a spring flood, a person uninfluenced by the periods of art had replaced the rococo dolphin with a solid porphyry plaque pulled from the gateway of a Venetian palace. On this was carved in strong, enduring strokes the portrait of a lion of St. Mark. The grim yet friendly beast, holding with one solid paw the open book, looked blandly forth upon the lovely pagan scene around him—looked at the costly hornbeam avenues, the terraced paths, the tanks and fountains of this exquisite pleasaunce; and as the young girl, to whom such surroundings formed a sort of natural setting, took her seat, he seemed to watch her with an amused, benignant air, whilst the Cupid above him presented a feckless restlessness by contrast.

How extraordinarily do dumb, inanimate objects such as these mingle with, and even influence, our lives! Linda knew, nay, cared very little, about the Venetian Republic; she was aware that gondolas were black, that once they had been as sumptuously furnished as the ceilings in the Ducal Palace; but this was a mere coincidence, the cause of it did not affect her, and yet, years afterwards, she

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remembered these points; and the little feckless Cupid, the stern Venetian lion, too, appeared almost in the light of a prophecy.

The seat where she sat was warm with all the splendid sun of May. There was a seething of millions of insects in the air. Her lover was coming towards her, brushing the leaves and the blossoms of the bay with his uncovered head. All the light of the sun was in his eyes, and making, as it were, a glory on his brow. She knew he was thinking of her, for he smiled, and Dudley had frowned for the greater part of his existence, just by habit, or perhaps because he was at once conscientious and rather stupid. She sat very still, she would not show him she was there; she would not rise to meet him. She saw the things which grew around her in the grass; with her feet she crushed the woodruff; its sweet cool scent rose up towards her forehead. Large bushes of St. John's wort studded the ground around her. The petals of their flowers were pressed back flat under the abundance of their golden stamens. Small lizards ran out from the shade of the leaves, and lay panting, as though their sides must break, in the warm sunlight of the stone gods. The periwinkles all were over, but one stray blossom Linda saw, born out of season and very pale and fragile. Mechanically she stooped to pick it, and then it was that Dudley noticed her presence.

"So, you're here!" was all that he said. But he came and sat down beside her.

For an hour or so the sun blazed on in the garden; then suddenly it sank behind the hill, and a shade like death fell over the villa, and over the tanks and the trees and the alleys. Linda got up with a shudder and a feeling of fear in her throat; but her lover, whose mind was finally fixed, said he would fetch her a wrap.

That was all.

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CHAPTER XXVII

AFTERTHOUGHTS

Two weeks later Linda went back to Venice. Two weeks later the avalanche of family congratulations, and there were scarcely any open criticisms, descended on her. Two weeks later the glory and the dream had tarnished, if, indeed, it had not wholly perished; and, in the eyes of this strange girl, the questions of the why and the wherefore, the vision of the length and weariness of the final issue, were already creeping like night on the dawn of her dreams.

Sebastian had been right. It was Love that Linda had fallen in love with, it was not Dudley, or any other particular person. Dudley had merely come into her life at a certain psychological moment, when, like a flower in spring, the chalice of her woman's nature was opened to receive new life and love. At that particular moment it so happened that she had been brought into special and direct contact with men who lived more on their brains than on their bodies; with men of intellect already exhausted by life, and to whom its early enthusiasms seemed grown into "mistakes." Painfully as such men attracted the curious and unusual girl, they by no means satisfied the more normal sides of her complex nature; and, in spite of her acceptance of their ways and their words, she unconsciously was seeking for something different. At that moment of her destiny Dudley appeared, and it was surely natural that in the awaking of the more sensuous elements of her pure, if over-excitable nature, the heart of the girl should go forth to this particular presence of manhood. There was a touch of home about Dudley in the midst of an enchanting palace

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of dreams. His beauty, the very disdainfulness of his bearing, made a most subtle appeal to her. Dudley embodied something of strong and irrevocable manhood which contrasted very forcibly with that of the men about her. Dudley was like Basil, but he was different to Basil; in outward polish, anyhow, he was very different to Basil, for he had been whipped into shape, as it were, by public schools and a military training and discipline. Dudley did not argue; he was healthy, direct, and simple; he had a power of sitting for long periods perfectly still, and of looking very splendid and clean and reliable. His stillness, which was, in fact, only the outcome of physical health and of perfectly subdued emotions, served as a sort of solid medium through which Linda, her own brain teeming with a million visions and dreams, could look forth upon the entrancing natural scenes around her.

What days, what nights, were those at Cardinale. Rarely has any girl-lover lived so vitally, so completely, as Linda did amongst the fountains and the hornbeam avenues of the great Italian villa. At dawn they would sometimes climb together to the hills above. How strange and how fantastic seemed the young chestnut-copse with some rare shepherd calling to his flock upon a pipe or reeds, or battered ocarina. And the tops of the volcanic hills, with sunrise creeping over them! What endless cushions of wild thyme grew up there for lambs and lovers to rest upon.

Something of Linda's own half-pagan spirit, for the first and for the last time, too, entered the heart of her English lover in those strange mystic days of June. He became for the moment a different man; he was willing to "exist," and not to lead and to manage; he was willing to live for a little while unconscious of our ordinary chains and shackles. He quietly followed Linda's guiding, as he crossed the threshold of that palace of primitive nature to which Linda herself had always had the key, and which she so dearly loved.

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Sebastian who, from the first, had disapproved of the sudden and ill-suited courtship, now realized that it was a thing which must certainly be faced and probably even accepted. He therefore proceeded to announce the news to his sister. Dudley had already written a short and formal announcement of it to his father. The letter of Dudley left nothing between the lines. He merely stated that he had fallen in love with his cousin, had proposed to her, and had been accepted; that he hoped his father and mother would approve; and that he should like the marriage to come off as soon as matters connected with his regiment allowed of it. He mentioned that he would have to return to India, and there rejoin his regiment, before he could hope to marry, but that he would probably return to Europe before, or anyhow immediately after, Christmas.

Linda herself had written somewhat more fully to her father, but, much and dearly as she loved him, she knew that there was no real emotional sympathy between her and her home; and her words and her letters were always clouded with a certain reticence and restraint. It was her Uncle Sebastian to whom Linda's inner nature really responded, but between him and her an embarrassment had lately arisen, which was trying and painful to both.

Frau Castelberg wrote a prim and guarded note of congratulation, and a rather more marked postcript suggesting that her cousin should return to the Palazzo Molinaro, where her room was always ready for her, and where possibly life was more suitable for a young girl than that of the villa at Cardinale.

June was fast waning into July, spring was over and summer was here—heavy and dull, like middle-age. And so, on a day far hotter and more resplendent than that on which they had arrived, the party packed its trunks, entered the ramshackle carriage, and drove across the glittering sun-baked plains to Padua.

Don Pedro came to the gate, his blue cotton handkerchief

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flapping across his enigmatic eyes. He held Linda's hand in his for rather a long while, and he peered long and curiously into her exquisite face; next he looked up at Dudley. "My salutes," he said, with some strange concealed intention. Then, turning to Sebastian, in nasal Latin as though he were chanting the Mass, he added: "I write no books on marriage. I only write upon divorce. These two will not come again to Cardinale. Still, I am always at home and your humble servant."

Linda knew no Latin, and Dudley had lost the little he ever acquired.

In Venice the air was positively suffocating. The Venetians were awake all night in the streets, singing, talking, laughing, betting. All trace of winter damp had long since left the Palazzo Molinaro; a warm and seething air, like the scent of flowers in a hidden forest permeated Walpurga's home from cellar to attic-chamber. On Linda's table stood the same glass tumbler, but no carnations were in it now—just a bunch of red geraniums such as one may see in any English villa garden, but rarely in the Alps or Italy. The geraniums clashed with the general atmosphere, and the girl, who was breathing in the splendid, almost tropical feeling of the palace, felt for a moment estranged, and pushed the flowers from her. Letters lay on the table too; one from her father and one from her Aunt Christina, and one or two from England; her aunt, Mrs. James, her cousin Susan. Linda had formed a notion that these last would not be altogether smooth, and she was, therefore, much surprised to find a long and an almost sentimental outpouring from her English aunt.

"Do you know, Linda dear," the lady wrote, "do you know I had really guessed it! Yes, all that evening, when you and I were peeping at the picture of Endymion, I felt that something was going to 'happen.' And then I was a little afraid about other people for you. I did not quite like that wicked German count with the big dog. I thought him just a little like Mephistopheles—

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what do you think of that? And then, a long time ago there was a funny little Swiss boy, called Basil, or some such name; a friend of yours. . . . But that is all quite over now, darling, and you will marry my Dudley and be my own little daughter after all. We can do so many lovely embroideries together. I have just been to Liberty's, and I have been very extravagant and bought several new designs. There is one with roses which I think you will like. But it has very, very large thorns on the stalk. I think they are perhaps rather too large, but that is also perhaps a little like other things in life—thorns, I mean, on roses. I might make you a nightdress-case with it; or I might make a picture framed as a fire-screen. You will want a fire-screen for your little home with Dudley. . . ."

The letter rambled on. At that particular moment it was somehow terribly unwelcome and out of place. It conveyed the impression that a small and dexterous spider had by some wayward chance caught in her net a rare and exquisite butterfly. The spider did not propose to eat the butterfly, but merely to embalm its brilliant plumage with a hopeless series of tiny webs. Linda's heart sank within her, and a horrible apparition of some little villa in a row of other such villas arose before her: a home planned and visited by her English relations. She turned to her father's letter; it was very short, and it was also sad, though there was in it an attempt at cheerfulness and welcome. The sudden news brought the past before the quiet doctor, and it seemed a sort of reversal of his own love story; as though some passionate lyric on love had been twisted into a rather dreary tract in prose. England was about to take from him his daughter—the people from whom he had gathered his young wife demanded back her child. But there were other objections at the back of his mind, and these he did not try to dissect; for his was not an introspective nature. From the depths of his soul he desired the welfare of his daughter; he merely, he scarce knew why, desired that it might have come to her in any other form or manner. A short and formal note from the always impassive Susan was quietly read and put aside, and also the letters of one or two of her few friends who approved of what seemed to

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them to be, at least, an "adequate," if not an exciting, marriage.

Then Linda went to the mirror and took off her hat. The green gauze veil had been discarded. "Wear it, of course, if you like," Dudley had said to her. "But I can't pretend to admire it. . . . Only of course I do like anything which you put on, you know," he had added, perceiving a shade on her forehead. She had bought a long white gauze instead, and under it her face looked small and chiselled, like some curious Renaissance gem. Expression had developed in her eyes, for she had really been having her honeymoon in advance. But the letters and the coming back to scenes which belonged to that time of her life before Cardinale had forced things into a new perspective.

Linda, with all the painful intuition which goes with a certain sensitiveness, indeed, with a touch of genius for ordinary life, sitting on the yellow divan of the Venetian palace where first her passionate dream had germinated, received that day a sudden flash of insight. The situation rose before her: the dull round, the continuity of marriage, all in an alien setting too. She shuddered and went chill. The overpowering heat of the morning was turning to thunder. Suddenly the sun disappeared, and darkness fell on the roofs and the canals, whilst a low and distant rumble portended a coming hurricane at sea.

Walpurga's welcome had been reserved, even a trifle haughty. At this moment she entered the room with a note. She looked a little anxiously at her cousin, but passed no comment and went to close the window. Linda started to her feet.

"Let me do that," she said, as though aroused from dreams. "You always do everything yourself, Cousin Walpurga."

"There are dreamers and doers," answered Walpurga. "Have you read your letter? The man is waiting for an answer."

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Linda opened the note, which came from her Uncle Sebastian.

"I am settled into my rooms," it said, "they are lovely and cool and all in order. I've had nothing but asparagus and red wine for lunch. It's simply splendid. But some bores propose to come to tea—a Mrs. Crewe and her daughter, May Morrison. The daughter is a wretch; the mother is more or less like her. But they've married between them one of the nicest men in England. They want to have a look at you, as you will be their neighbour at Coneyhurst. They are off to-morrow. Morrison probably won't come, but it's him I would like you to see and hear. Can't you bring Pallas Athene with you? She would make them sit up! Her splendour would annihilate their flummery. Anyhow, five o'clock to-day, remember; and there are letters which you must read. Dudley will be coming, too."

"I will come at five," wrote Linda. Her head was heavy, but she caught at any exit from her thoughts. She put on one of her simplest frocks—a tussore one with some fine Burano lace upon it. She put on, too, the old gold chain which hung so heavy round her slender neck. The plaits of her thick hair gave distinction to her simple clothes; and her general, unusual, half-shy, half-indifferent bearing, as she walked very quietly into her uncle's room, made an appeal to the fastidious social eyes, with Dudley walking so stiffly beside her.

The two ladies on the sofa put up their glasses. They each carried long tortoise-shell glasses which they used or did not use, for they could perfectly see without them. They were faultlessly rather than "over" dressed, in pale mauves and soft shimmering black silk, and gossamer ruffles high round their ears. The mother looked almost as young as the daughter, only her skin was white like that of skimmed milk, whereas that of the daughter was the cream. They spoke in musical, inquiring voices, gently and consolingly, as one might speak to a child in a rage. They asked Sebastian a great many questions about books and

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about art. They had been looking, they said, almost continuously at pictures in the mornings; in the afternoons they admitted that they did a little hunting up of people—"so many distinguished people," they explained, "in various hotels and palaces." They were perfectly kind to Linda, but infinitely remote, and she suddenly felt like a rough piece of ore, and they, to her, appeared as valuable, but undesirable, jewels set in fine glass cases, and not to be touched or broken. The ladies had all the acquired habit of life; Linda had nothing but herself and her scattered friends, her new love and her natural loveableness. Dudley showed a sudden stiff shyness. Sebastian chaffed them mercilessly, for he loathed the "culture" of the type to which these two pretended.

"Well," he cried rather harshly, facing round on the younger lady as she described a picture by Carpaccio, that man of fun and frolic, as "quite dear, but just a little capricious." "Well! is your husband not coming to fetch you?"

"Who shall tell?" the lady answered. "He is always working at his manuscripts. We only see him at meal times!"

The party could not be precisely described as a success, but Mr. Crane was one of the "distinguished persons who had to be hunted up," and the ladies swallowed any crusts, or even the crumbs, from their afternoon effort; Linda, too, was unusual and worthy of investigation. Presently the ladies demanded their gondola, and with gracious smiles they ruffled away to their hotel on the Riva.

"If only the divine Morrison had come himself and not those horrid women," wailed Sebastian, after they had left the room.

"They stared so," said Linda.

"Yes, of course. They were taking you in. You may be the 'lady of Coneyhurst' some day. Only think of that, my dear!" Sebastian noticed that Linda winced. He had not intended to pain her. "They recognized in you

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something very unlike themselves," he added. "They will go and write you down in their diaries; they have squared you up, but not unfavourably. They are bad lots themselves; but they can detect sincerity in others, and they most certainly are not fools. They are thoroughly bad lots," he continued, half to himself. "And Morrison tied up with them for life—it's positively revolting!"

"Well! but if you feel like that, why did you invite them to tea with you?" said Linda with sudden emphasis. Dudley had accompanied the ladies to their gondola, and gone off himself to the poste restante to look for his letters and papers.

"Do you want the truth?" said Sebastian with a sudden rough tenderness. "Well, then, I invited them wholly and entirely to shake you out of your coma!"

"Coma!" queried Linda.

"Yes. Coma. In the life which is now before you, you will have to encounter every sort and condition of social being—what is more, you will have to be polite to them—no more picking and choosing, remember!"

"But I never meant to be impolite to these people. Only they stared so, and they did not like me. They were different, and they thought themselves very much better."

"They thought nothing of the kind! Indeed, they were rather jealous of you. And all women of their type stare. And no one, mark my words, is a better target for stares of that order than a rather unusual bride, with a combination of beauty, humility, and defiance. Why! you are simply made to be stared at," said Sebastian, gazing upon her.

"How horrible!" said Linda. Distress, or rather confirmation of distress, was already creeping across her soul.

"No," said Sebastian quietly, "it is not really horrible; it is natural. Birds and animals are ten times harder in their method of scrutiny than even fashionable women. Peasants, I suppose, are the hardest of all. 'Rough winds do tear the tender buds of May,' he murmured. And remember, too, you have elected to join what is pleased to

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call itself Society, and you must be prepared to pay the penalties of society. You cannot remain pottering and flower-gathering on the fringe of the forest—you must get inside and cut the wood."

There was a long pause, during which a succession of scattered thoughts coursed through the mind of the awakening woman. She went to the window and looked to the water. A heavy air, laden with scirocco, came puffing up from the canal. Everything seemed dark and damp and faded.

"I want to go away," she said, suddenly facing round on Sebastian.

"To go away?"

"Yes, I want to leave Venice—to get to the mountains."

"Well! and what do you expect to do in the mountains?"

"The flowers all are out there now. Things grow there. There is nothing growing in Venice. It is dull; it is dead."

"Is that all?" asked Sebastian.

"That's not all," she said. "It's a lot of things as well as that."

Sebastian had not altered his position; he was lying on the large divan and accurately cutting the leaves of a book with one of his tortoise-shell paper-knives. Under his eyelids he glanced up quickly at his niece, who was sitting by the window and looking out to the lagoon beyond it.

"Well!" he suggested. "Dudley will be gone in a day or two."

"Oh yes, he's going," said the girl. Her face was flushed. She paused. Then suddenly she spoke, with sudden effort and determination. "Uncle Sebastian," she said, getting down from her seat, "Dudley's mind is like that; like that glass," she said, pulling towards her and half upsetting a crystal bowl upon the table. "I can see in and in, and all through and all around it. It's perfectly frightful—I mean to say, I am frightened at it. The glass at least reflects."

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"And Dudley retains?" suggested Sebastian.

"Everything—all things," gasped the girl passionately.

Away in an expensive sitting-room of the Hotel Danieli, Morrison's mother-in-law was writing a letter to one of her intimate friends—to a lady who lived in a large country house not very far from Coneyhurst.

Here is a portion of her letter:

"The father is only a little Swiss doctor, but the Swiss have 'ancestors,' I believe, just as we have. Only they ignore them, now that they are become a republic—tuck them away in their attics. You remember the girl's mother, Mary, a silly, neurotic woman, but a beauty in her way, and with money, which this girl inherits, of course. The girl herself is quite distinguished, but she can't dress herself. I should like to have the dressing of her: some sort of a white tunic, I think, made by Paquin—a hamadryad, a Bacchante, and her hair loose behind her ears. She wore it plaited up in a tight coronet above her forehead. It would be difficult to deal with her hair; rather too much of it, and her head very small and beautifully formed and set on her neck. She is not happy, and she is only half in love with Dudley. *He*, of course, is quite squared up in his mind about her. His family don't usually go back upon things, though there are exceptions—like that wild and rather disagreeable Mr. Sebastian. I think Dudley will marry her—he's perfectly obstinate and she isn't; but there will be plenty of 'scenes' before then. She looks very young and also very old. Just for the moment she's mad about life—Italy, all that sort of thing; and she has got it mixed up with love and with marriage; but one knows quite well that this won't last. It can't last, for *she* is altogether unusual, and he is very much like all other 'nice' young men, though he happens to have fallen in love with this particular woman. She is good—quite pure and straight, and she'll never do a wrong thing; she is tiresomely good, but she is an untamed, and, what is more, an untameable piece of nature. *He* has accepted discipline all his life, and will force it on others. *She* is unfathomable and unteachable even to herself. Well, it's all rather funny and interesting; but in a sense one can't help envying our humdrum Dudley James his possession of a real, live hamadryad. She's pure enough, as I said before,"

added the woman—who, together with her objectionable correspondent, was perfectly acquainted with girls of another type—

"she will only be miserable, but she will never be 'broken in.' And what is quite certain is, she never can be the normal, orderly

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wife of a British officer or county squire or whatever Dudley ends by being. And the other certainly is that Dudley will *never, never,* NEVER be himself a Pan or a Satyr! I am not sure that the girl is quite human,"

the letter rambled on,

"but men and virtuous women will always be fascinated by something hauntingly pathetic in her eyes. I quite hope, anyway, Charles may not see her. He's another of those strange, virtuous, inhuman creatures. Our May is growing heartily sick of him. You see. . . ."

The letter continued in a vein which we have no desire to preserve.

Morrison himself took it down to the post. As he passed through the hall a German Backfisch, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief, exclaimed: "What a noble man!" But the young English gentleman with the straight sad eyes neither saw nor heard her.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SORROW OF LOVE

"The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,
The full round moon, and the star-laden sky,
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves,
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

"And then you came, with those red, mournful lips.
And with you came the whole of this world's tears,
And all the trouble of her labouring ships,
And all the anguish of her myriad years.

"And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,
The cold, pale moon, the white stars in the sky,
And the loud chanting of the unquiet leaves,
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry."

W. B. YEATS.

LINDA slept but little that night. Sebastian's words about "society," about the irrevocableness of her entry there, had somehow quieted her for the moment, for she was a strange mixture of rebelliousness and of acceptance. The fact, too, that Dudley was going a long way away from her gave her a certain sense of delay and security. One whole part of her nature demanded the contact with Dudley—why not cling to that part? But first she must explain to Dudley exactly how she felt. She was certain of that—she must be honest with her lover—she must *explain*, and then, perhaps, all would be well. Very early she sat up in bed and she wrote her note. "I feel I must speak to you," she said. "Come as early as you can. I must talk to you here."

Just about the same hour Dudley had a letter from his father. Mr. James did not oppose the marriage exactly,

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and he did not forbid it. Money played a rather important part in all the calculations of Mr. James, and Linda certainly had money. But he said that he objected to the marriage of cousins, that there were "peculiarities about Swiss people"; also, he said that "soldiers on foreign service" should think very seriously before they involved a wife in their "roving careers."

Dudley opened his father's letter after he had opened Linda's, and he stuffed the latter into his pocket, for both were inconvenient. He had been early to the Lido to swim in the open sea; he was fresh and in perfect physical health; he desired no questions or controversies; he had only one more day in Venice, and this he wished to enjoy. He walked at once to the Palazzo Molinaro, where Linda received him in her cousin's sitting-room. She had on a white muslin dress with small black velvet bows; she was hot and flushed; the heat and excitement of all the days before, combining with her sleepless night, had exhausted her strength. She had fully prepared herself for this meeting with Dudley, but when he was in front of her, and close beside her, a little puzzled, a little pained, the old thrill of joy in his presence went straight again to her girlish heart.

"It's just this, Dudley," she said, forcing herself to speak to him. "It's somehow like this: I love all sorts of things which you would scarcely know or think important. And these things I shouldn't get in England or in India. And then, you see, I might worry and want them—I mean, I've been thinking——"

Dudley tried to understand. "But these are all such little things," he said at last. "I mean, if you really love me. They're all only little things. And you said you loved me?"

"Yes, I do, I do love you. But I love all sorts of other things as well. It's not people, it's *things*. I mean now, for instance, when I'm not quite well——"

"Not well?" said her lover, aghast and unquiet.

"Oh yes, I'm well, I'm all right really. But I'm tired. And then, I was afraid that when you were gone. . . ."

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"But if that's all, come to England, too, Linda. Mother would love to have you, and father, too." (Dudley tried to forget the letter he had crushed in his pocket.) "Anyhow, you mustn't stay here in Venice. It's too hot. It will hurt you. Come to England."

"No, it's *home* I want," almost sobbed the girl. "It's the mountains. I seem to want the mountains."

"But sometimes you say that you hate the mountains, and that you simply can't bear to live amongst them."

"Well, I don't want England," she said with abrupt inconsequence.

He thought for a little while, his handsome head bent down. Then: "You are not quite well," he said. "Why not have a rest?"

"But it's your last day in Venice, and we must be together on your last day in Venice."

The next day Linda was in a high fever, but she struggled to be up and to say good-bye to Dudley. He knew so little of illness; he saw she was hot, but he never guessed she was really ill. He took her in his arms, for he loved and he needed her with all the strength of a lover's heart, and she let herself go once again to his love; she was weary and sick, she could not remonstrate, and she sobbed long after he had left her.

Walpurga got the doctor and they put her to bed. For days upon days she lay there tossing; her nature seemed stretched and she could not rest. The great cool room went swaying and swinging up and round and about her head. Everything that had ever happened in the world of people seemed to her now but a spent, fantastic dream. Yet the natural things were real enough. She saw how the gentians grew in bright blue bunches along the Alpine bogs, and the cotton grass and white pinguicula. She saw how the raspberries ripened in shady places amongst the wild cinerarias. She saw the lonely shepherd-boys high on the Alps where the arnicas grow. But she did not see the

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cities or the palaces; she did not dwell on Cardinale—she thought nothing at all about the books, or the pictures; she did not even want her Uncle Sebastian.

As she got a little better she began to read, and everything she read seemed totally different from what it had ever seemed before, longer, duller, less like life. She had a thirst for snow, for the little streams which run from the glaciers down through the meadows where the marigolds grow, and the pink polygonum and other freshening flowers. The austere presence of her Cousin Walpurga alarmed her; the quiet Italian doctor, with clear grey eyes, which sometimes seemed to pierce beyond her heart, and even to reach her soul, frightened and upset her; but she trusted the doctor, for clever doctors know so much of mental suffering. He scolded her gently for her illness, but said that fever freed the blood, and that of course she must not hurry—and it was nothing serious—a touch of the sun, a chill from the hills where he heard she had walked too early and late. And the lover had gone off to England? Well! well! Dio mio! She was young. Young plants must struggle till they meet the light. He would bring his own little girl to see her.

Linda passionately loved young children; perhaps they were the only human things which really touched her inward heart and shook it to its foundations. The beautiful little girl with solemn Italian eyes came and sat on a chair by her bed, and strung some blue Venetian beads, putting them very deliberately, as well-trained children do, on a table, according to their size. She was only eight years old, but she was precise and self-possessed, and she had been told not to talk very much to the pretty signorina. Linda lay with her cheek on her hands and watched the child, attempting not to weep. But the needs of all good women swept across her tired heart. Her little note to Dudley that night was longer than those which had gone before, tenderer, too, and fuller.

Sebastian had left Venice. The heat was overmuch for him, and he had returned to his English home. Thence

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he attempted to bring reason to the heart of his niece, first by kindness, during the worst part of her illness, and next by a series of caustic sallies and rallyings.

"For God's sake pull yourself together, my dear," he pleaded in one of his letters; "satiated and glutted by the contemplation of your own small self, you will wither and die. Stand up. *Do* something or other! Settle to marry Dudley, or else chuck him—but do it definitely. Life, after all, is not very long, and when even a quite young tree begins to rot at the root, it is soon choked off by other trees, and withers and falls in a season. You are far too good for that sort of thing—you've a whole long life ahead of you."

In another place he wrote:

"There is a dreadful dose of your maternal grandmother in you, and a lot of your mother, too. These ladies were all brains and no body. They at once undermined and ennobled our tiresome family record. . . ."

And again:

"When you get better you must settle to something. You must read, or you must work. Anyhow, you must *do* something. You simply dare not drift—you have too much energy and self-respect for that sort of an idle game. There are two alternatives: you must play hard at life and have all the background painted in for you by underlings (this were a dull business, you must admit?), or you must make yourself live life, conduct it down to its meanest details. It's no use pretending that lots of life won't bore you; it bores us *all* if we are only honest about it. Look at Labour! But we will not come to all that sorry quarrel yet. Boredom is half of the job of life; even when we work, boredom is the other half of all our portion. But with, or without, Dudley, it is entirely certain that you must hammer out your own salvation, for you will never be one to sit idly by.

"There is something else I wanted to say to you; it is this—you have got what is called the artistic temperament, and no one but yourself can save you from the destructive forces of this thing. Do you know what people mean when they talk of the 'artistic temperament'? Most of them don't know themselves what they mean, but I will tell you what it means. It means the case of a noble and creative mind at war with the low ideals of everyday existence. The prophets had the artistic temperament, the poets have it; but these have the power of expression, through work, and I doubt whether you have got this latter. You may have it for the moment, but it often passes with the toils of marriage. No

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one can save you from its tempests but yourself; no one can row you into the calm waters. But the harbour of refuge is there all the same.

"Remember this, my child," added the man who was himself enmeshed, "and remember, too, that I love you, and am always your devoted uncle and friend,

"SEBASTIAN CRANE."

On the night that Sebastian posted that letter there was a final scene with his most reputable brother-in-law, with whom his relations had long been strained. But the inquisitive butler who brought in their port could make neither head nor tail of Mr. Sebastian's strange denunciation of the Crane pedigree. For it was generally understood in the elegant summary of the servants' hall that "poor Miss Mary had married beneath her."

"I tell you that you and I, we Cranes and James, are mushrooms — mushrooms of the eighteenth century!" declared Sebastian. "Linda's paternal ancestry quarters more nobility in one generation than ours have done, or are likely to do, till death conceals us in the dust. My sister Mary was lifted *up*, not *downwards*, by her marriage. If your respectable son is not jilted by Linda Caflisch; if that priceless creature destroys her life by frittering it away on our stupidities and inadequacies; then, indeed, there is some chance of enlivening once again our torpid and our tiresome blood!"

Mr. James made no reply, but he mentally noted that the moment had arrived when it would be well for him and his brother-in-law to sever their mutual household connection. So Mr. James kept on the big town house, and a few months later Sebastian took up his permanent abode in the little old Elizabethan manor house which was left to him by his mother.

This delightful old building lay smothered away in a drowsy portion of Somerset. It had a trout-stream running lazily along the bottom of the quiet old park crowded with ancient timber. Bee orchises grew on the downs beyond, and there were foxgloves in the copses, and yellow cumfrey,

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and purple orchises with spotted leaves in all the woods and water-meadows round.

"This house is my very own home, but it is your home, too, my dear," Sebastian wrote to Linda. "Come to me here whenever you can, or whenever you feel in the mood to. I shall leave it all to you in my will, remember that, my dear; your mother loved it when we were children, and when we got away together here she was always more happy and always more her real and better self."

When this last letter came, Linda was stronger. The fever had worked itself out of her system, leaving her white, and limp, and thin; she went down into the garden, and she sat by the big stone table under the fir-tree and read for a while profoundly. She was awake to human life again, and in a way that she had never been before.

Sebastian had left her a selection of novels and of poetry. She never cared much for history, it always failed to convince her. Why should one country be different to another country? What was the use or the meaning of nationality? It was only the goodness of *individuals* which really mattered, and their beauty, and the splendour of Nature.

Linda did not care for science. To her it seemed to rob Nature of all romance. What could it matter that man should find out a few more details? God, who had *made* things, knew always so very much more. Let there be mystery—and Night—stars whose distance from our tiny planet need not be measured by our puny calculations. And let the beautiful flowers grow without our cuttings and dissections. Man could never make things better, only worse in many ways. Linda's grandmother, of whom Sebastian wrote so wittily, had once, to the horror of a large family dinner-party, proclaimed her view that "Man was simply the bad accident of Nature." And although Linda knew very little about it, this, too, was her own unconscious opinion.

In the house above, Walpurga was preparing for departure—the linen was piled to the summit of every shelf in

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the great walnut linen-press, and packed with little bags of bergamot and thyme.

In ten days more, on the first day of August, Linda and her cousin were crossing the lagoons, and rumbling over the great hot plains till they came to the Alps, which they crossed at dawn. By the end of that second day they had reached the upland valleys of their home.

How all had changed for Linda. She had left these plains as a child; she came back now a woman.

She walked to her own little room like one in dreams. It was a very hot evening, but all within was fresh and clean and homely, smelling of turpentine and clove carnations. The panelled ceiling seemed to press down almost to the top of the huge wooden bed by the window. A large white quilt which her Aunt Christina had been knitting for years was spread on the bed. Her English mother had died in that bed, and she herself had first seen life there. Instinctively Linda went to the wall where the photograph of a family group was framed. It was the group taken at Coneyhurst about ten years or so ago, when she was a little girl of eight. She sat crouched up in the foreground looking cross in a clean white frock, the heavy masses of her hair let loose upon her shoulders by her English maid. Dudley, in a Norfolk coat, and very stiff and cross himself, was crouched beside her. At their back kneeled Joan, earnest and cool, her clear face cut like a cameo or a rare Greek gem.

Linda looked at the group and then she leaned out of the window. A shimmering mist of heat rested on the distant peaks and filled the valleys and the forests; the village was very quiet, for most of the inhabitants were up on the Alps, and only the older people left behind to mind the houses in the valleys. The water of the fountain splashed in the wooden trough; a woman was there with a copper pail which clanked as she filled it; some old men smoked on a bench by the churchyard wall, and the hens went crooning

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amongst the dust-heaps. Behind them all the great snow-mountains shone, remote and solemn. It was a scene of extraordinary peace, very unlike the Venetian street, very unlike, indeed, to Cardinale.

Linda sat on in the window. Presently she took up her letters which were lying on the table beside her. There was a big envelope from Dudley, a new portrait of himself done by a London photographer. "I knew you would rather have that sort of thing," he wrote in his letter. "I can't say I like it myself, indeed, it's pretty rotten, I think, so I send you one of my older ones as well." The older portrait was done in full regimentals. Dudley looked his best in uniform to the eyes of all ordinary persons. But the first portrait showed him in the old tweed suit which he had worn when he came to Venice; and the man's most perfect beauty was revealed in it, for there was little of the tailor to hamper or mar it. The fact that Dudley had submitted to sit for such a portrait convinced the girl of her cousin's love for her more than any other word or action which he could ever have chosen. Instinctively she placed the proof beside the first old group, and then she went to her aunt in the hall.

Then an extraordinary peace, a calm contentment, seemed for a while to come over Linda. Various causes contributed to her present peace, and the biggest of these was probably her temporary detachment. She was practically alone; alone to live and enjoy the natural beauty for which her inner being hungered. That bewildering buzz of curious and highly developed men, which in Italy had burst upon and had distracted all her youth, was for the time removed. Basil was away in the Engadine; Dudley had started for India; her father only came and went beset with ordinary work and worries. There was no one to absorb her reserve of vitality. In the little arbour of mountain-ashes she sat very quiet through the morning with her books. Often she went long walks through the woods and

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the valleys; often she helped old friends with their work in the fields and the gardens. The news of her engagement was known in Trins, but there was something remote and indefinite about it, and her old friends made small comment.

At night she lay on the great wooden bed pushed up to the window—the steady summer stars, the splendid moon shining on her pillow, friendly but impassive; the sounds of the river below in the valley borne up to her in quiet pantings.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE HOME OF SEBASTIAN

The Alien

" I am come to lands where I have no concern,
Out of the proper places that were mine.
What should it be to me that the stars shine,
And fires of sunrise and of sunset burn?
Your ways and woes I am not fain to learn.
O men that weep, that falter and repine,
O men that are drunk with longing or with wine,
That always pass me by, always, always return!

" For you come back; and unessential stars
And crowds that have not where to lay their head,
And the white barques lift their returning spars
Upon the moonlight when the day lies dead.
That which was mine beyond the unseen bars
Comes not, but all vain things come back instead."

Gould.

At the end of September Linda left the mountains and travelled to England. She had had invitations from all sorts of people who were anxious to see her, and doors of many different houses stood open wide to greet the rare and curious bride of Dudley James. People of very varying types had always been drawn towards Linda, and even as a child in the decorous home of Mrs. James she had attracted the attention of any kindly, and always of any eccentric, guest, for she had an odd way of drifting into the lives of other people.

Linda passionately loved human beauty; it came only second to natural beauty with her. No jealous thought had ever entered her generous and gifted nature; and though

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men were ready to love her, it was to women, and to beautiful and distinguishd ones incapable of jealousy and petty malice, that her own soul went forth.

The great homes of England had a strange attraction for her. The studied silence of the immense lawns, the long dim avenues of lime or oak, the splendid "neglect" of deer parks, the Italian pictures hanging in great marble halls, the curiously naked statues, dusted by an army of proper British housemaids; the books, the greenhouse and flowers; the ancient mirrors, and all the cared-for splendour of the past which made so perfect, if so artificially studied, a background for the great English ladies and their prosperous children—these things made full appeal to the passionate senses of the girl. These things drew forth a something strong, if fleeting, in her nature.

But these were only a little portion. And there were multitudes of different things from which her whole being recoiled with terrified and shuddering horror when she compared them with her mountain world, and with that other Italian world on which she had entered only this last springtime. There were the seething seas of squalid dwellings, with the cloak of darkness always over them. When Linda looked down from an English train on these, she seemed as though she beheld a nightmare; as though the sun and the stars, the rain and the blessed winter snow-storms never, never would reach to the children playing in these mean places. And there were dwellings almost more horrible still, and those were the dwellings of "respectable" suburbs; the rows upon rows of tiny houses, with little smothered, mouldering, or frozen "gardens." There were horrible villas set amongst laurels, where people existed and gossiped together. An endless, chaotic, passionless, meaningless world it all appeared to her frightened and, perhaps, untractable vision.

The happiest and least clouded of Linda's English days

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were those which she spent with Sebastian in his south country home. There she felt herself and there she was alive.

Regularly she wrote to Dudley, and regularly his answers came back to her—short and dry and rather dull, but quite unruffled, and full of eventual plans for their mutual life together. His regiment was to remain in India till well into April, and it would be impossible for him to get away till then, he said. He hoped she would "understand," and that she would be "happy staying in England." It was perfectly clear to Dudley that the more his future wife remained in England, the better it would be for himself and for her, and for all concerned in their future welfare. The mental horizon of men of his nature covers but a very limited area, and Dudley was a pasha at heart. He would rope in his wife as soon as he possibly could manage to do so. Dudley, of course, did not know it himself, but he really admired the system of the harem as far as his own women-folk were concerned. Life was flowing easily for Linda now, he thought, and she herself made little resistance to his plans; she had no personal responsibilities in England, so the actual toils of its life did not encumber or distress her. She merely skimmed the cream of other people's lives; and the natural setting, though she would never have selected it, had no real horror for her as yet, for she was still in a position to alter it, or to fly from it at will.

And thus the splendid autumn days passed by and drew into December; and Linda had promised to spend Christmas with her Uncle Sebastian.

Everything smelt good in Sebastian's manor house; there were Eastern rugs upon the polished floors, and big bearskins were stretched upon his hearth. He had a passion for wax candles, and his sitting-rooms were lighted with these in heavy branched candelabra. A demon of wholly pagan frolic had possessed him, and he had determined to open

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his doors on Christmas Eve to all the children and the old women of the village. Sebastian was fond of old women, and he was a charming "gossip." A tree with a blaze of candles on it had been prepared in the raftered hall. A large quantity of Chinese lanterns had been hung and lighted, as the night was still and frosty, all up the long lime avenue which led from the lane to the front-door; and as some lanterns still remained they hung them on various old thorn-trees and oaks scattered throughout the park.

Inside the little old house—so low, so moss-grown were the old stones that they seemed a part of the very nature about them—inside, there were piles of apples and oranges in silver baskets, and of crackers and raisins and lumps of crystallized fruits; and in an Italian brazier, sandalwood and lavender smouldered on red-hot cinders.

The clergyman came and his sister, and a rather eccentric aristocrat whom "nobody called on," and one or two neighbours; and all said, "How charming is Mr. Sebastian—when he chooses," and, "How dear is that niece with the foreign name!"

A fiddler came from a neighbouring colliery, and the children danced and ate their oranges. At the end of the party Sebastian put on his big fur coat and stood on the steps with Linda beside him, saying good-bye to their guests. The stars shone very cold and still, with that half-muffled light peculiar to the stars in southern England. When the last small child had disappeared, and the last old woman had made her curtsey, Sebastian and Linda, like children themselves, went up the park and put out the Chinese lanterns. The mistletoe hung in heavy branches from the old apple-trees; the grass below was stiffened a little by hoar frost, but the ground itself was soft and moist and still. It was a typical south country night of winter. Peace immemorial breathed from the park with its trees and silent ponds, and the little old manor within it, with the light pouring forth from its threshold. Away in the

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village the clock struck ten; and further away in some distant kennels the hounds began to bark, and an owl flew by on silent wing.

Then the strange, incongruous pair of people, who seemed somehow to fit, and yet to be foreign to, their surroundings, came back from the outside nature, closing the door behind them. Sebastian's Venetian servant came from the kitchen and locked the house-door and drew the heavy crimson damask over the mullioned windows. A bright fire burned on the hearth, and Sebastian drew the cardinal's chair well up to the blaze. The room was otherwise only lighted by the candles in tall silver sconces; one or two Italian pictures, dark and old, hung on the walls. There was a mixture of something early Victorian, yet very old indeed, and essentially comfortable, in Sebastian's home; and Linda, who loved luxurious ease, although she also loved the austerity of mountains, felt at home and in warm and questioning vein that Christmas night.

"It's pagan, after all, isn't it?" she said, "pagan much more than Christian?"

"What is pagan?" asked Sebastian, lighting his pipe.

"Christmas is pagan. I mean the tree, and the lights in the orchard—all that is very pagan? How happy the clergyman was," she went on. "He looked quite a different man from what he looks in church on Sundays."

"That is the whole point," said Sebastian. "Christian teachings, as we often enough teach them, clash with our Western happiness—they jar. He was merely natural—it's not natural for him to be truly Christian from an English point of view. He is a very nice man, but he is a Western man, and yet he tries to be a Christian Churchman. We are all of us quite nice people; but we get worried and harassed; we don't allow ourselves to grow up normally. We hamper our growth with doctrines we cannot assimilate, and which have been utterly twisted and distorted by all our forbears for many centuries. We stifle our lives with hide-bound prejudices and preconceptions of

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'virtue' and of 'social duty.' Both are mistakes—both are unlike Christ——"

"But Christ himself?" . . . hazarded Linda.

Sebastian took a book from the shelf beside him. It was a beautiful hand-printed copy of St. John's Gospel, bound in black morocco. He turned the pages till he came to chapter four. Then he began to read aloud. He read with a curious spiritual revelation as it were, and always in later life these words came back as a help and a healing to the heart of his listener.

He closed the book, and he put it by, and looked for a long while into the fire. "Christ chose his company well," he said. "He supped with publicans, with strangers, and with sinners. He often supped with rich men, too, for He knew how much the so-called rich have got to suffer and endure. But it is our stifling bourgeois 'comforts,' our *pretensions* and our *condemnations*, which have no appeal for such as He—He would only have passed them by. He loved good company and sensible living. He loved Life in this life, and He loved to live it honestly and simply. He would have loved our lanterns under the mistletoe, I'm sure of that; but to-morrow, in the church, when they are singing the Hebrew chants and reading of some of the cruel Hebrew doings which He expressly came here to condemn, I scarcely think He'd enter?"

There was a long pause. Then Linda knelt up reverently before the fire, and, looking into it, she asked quite simply:

"What do you think He actually *did* for people like you and me, Uncle Sebastian?"

Sebastian clasped his hands together. "I think," he said after a long pause, "that He has taught true people how to be more bravely truthful. He has made otherwise comfortable people uncomfortable. He has comforted the really poor—and this includes the 'rich poor,' of whom there is and has always been a multitude as great, perhaps, as that of the poor in purse. He is a solace and a shelter for all our struggles and our outward failures; yes, He

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understands and He even accepts and loves all those things which the world denounces as our 'failures.' But I think that His wide spirit is very much too big for most people—I think it has only permeated a very little way into the actual heart of our material West. I think that the West is really in the normal course of its daily business—even in its pursuit of 'Duty'—at daggers drawn with the actual doctrines of Christ. Individuals in the West may, and do, love Him; but what of the nations as a whole? We dress Him up in a thousand incongruous dresses, but we don't accept Him as He was and is, we don't really accept Him. If we accepted Him we should not be so prosperous in the security of our Island. We certainly don't *love* Him—how should there be war, for instance, and all the preparatory, premeditated machinery of war, between nations if *really we did love Christ?*" Sebastian paused again. Then he went on: "How cruel what are called by the Western world 'good people' can be even to such as you and me, Linda. . . . And yet, what about those so-called good people with their hide-bound pursuit of duty and of virtue?" Again he waited. Then he looked for a little while across at Linda. "It is about you and your marriage, Linda dear, that I cannot help thinking to-night, and also because you asked me that question. You have such a very strong spiritual and mystical leaning somewhere deep down in your nature. This, of course, will grow with your years—but how will it help you, except to make you suffer? And are you strong enough to survive such sufferings and such outward humiliation and sense of failure as those which I foresee for you if you carry through this thing which you propose? Remember, you propose to live henceforward with a "man of action"—a man who devotes himself to what he has interpreted as his 'duty' as to a sort of fetish, but regardless quite of emotional persons like yourself. Dudley certainly will not bring in any question of Christ's real teaching in his controversies with you and your develop-

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ing ideals. His friends and his relations will do it even less than Dudley himself. It would clash with their accepted ideals of 'duty' if they did so. It would clash with what has made their Empire strong and triumphant over all other states and empires. You have already lived with a 'man of duty,' namely, with your own splendid father; you knew—you loved—our beloved Joan. But remember that the humane 'duty' of people like your father and Joan is a thing as far removed from the 'vision' of men like Dudley as some little beautiful unseen moon of Jupiter is to the burning of a gas-lamp. Englishmen—and they are strong and wonderful in their own fashion—really and finally appeal to their homes—to their Empire—and *not* to their religion for a final approval. They are strong, yes; but are they really Christian? . . . Do you know what Walt Whitman said about duty?"

> "'I give nothing as duties;
> What others give as duties, I give as loving impulses.
> Shall I give the heart's action as a Duty?'

"Do you know that wonderful poem of William Blake's, called 'Mary'? Blake certainly was one of those who understand. Some day you might read his 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell'—however, don't hurry about this now. But remember that it the 'duty-loving' people who will tear your erring heart in tatters, if they only can; for you too love Duty fiercely, but in a way different to theirs, and they will certainly never forgive you if you are at once good and yourself, and yet quite different to their ideal of goodness, and to themselves. . . . You asked me what I thought that Christ had really done for us. I think that He has left to us, one and all, the endless comfort of feeling that there is someone who ultimately *understands*. We feel certain that He at least will accept the better part of our higher striving and following of Vision, whatever form it happen to take and if only it is sincere. Jesus of Nazareth was Himself, of course, the very summing-up of genius. If we have the smallest spark of genius—and you

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yourself have a touch of it—this following of Vision is different to the following of the mass of the people, and therefore the mass will disdain it.''

Sebastian went to his bedroom, and he brought back with him the little battered copy of the Apocrypha which had belonged to his own strange and sometimes unhappy mother. He brought also her own New Testament, and first he opened this at the seventh chapter of the Acts, and read verses forty-seven to sixty. He paused, and then he spoke again and almost to himself: ''Gross men,'' he said, ''have stoned the prophets, the poets, and even the purest women since time began. They do it still, here in England, as they did it elsewhere.'' Then he opened his Apocrypha and he began very quietly to read in the third chapter of the Book of Wisdom. He read aloud the first ten verses; then he went on to chapter five and he read to verse seventeen:

'' ' . . . Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves: this was he whom we had sometime in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. Now is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints. . . .' ''

Sebastian's voice had broken a little as he read these wonderful words of consolation to those who on this earth have seemed to fail, and who yet eventually have shone in glory. But he seemed to put forth into peaceful waters as he dwelt on the piece I have quoted above, and there was a friendly, hopeful look in his usually rather tired eyes as he went and put the book back on its shelf again.

It was long past midnight when they parted, but Linda's mind seemed spiritually clearer, her heart and all her inward being, larger and more fulfilled than it had been since child-

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hood, when Pfarrer Caflisch was preaching his powerful sermons to the children's class in Trins.

On Christmas morning the village children walked primly into the musty old church in their strange trimmed Sunday hats, and Sebastian's views on the incongruities of East and West were pretty well confirmed. These English children sang the Christmas hymns in high shrill voices, somehow conveying the impression that both the angels and the shepherds who watched their flocks on the Syrian hills that night such centuries ago, and such thousands of miles away, were British-born! Linda sat in the high-backed pew behind the stone effigies of her remote maternal ancestors, and she felt as though something in her heart would burst at the familiar strains. The children touched one another when they noticed her smiling on them. Miss Linda Caflisch was all very well, they felt indeed a fearful attraction towards her, but she bore a foreign name, she had a "foreign way with her," and the elders of that homely village distrusted all foreigners—indeed, they might unconsciously pray for them as "foreigners and sinners" in their litany. They had long made a tacit sort of agreement in their own minds that the kings of the East were real kings like their own English Kings; just as so many Christians do really think of St. Paul as a kind of English don.

The service was rather a dead service, illumined by the joy of the children, and the softening influences of memory on uneventful lives.

On Christmas night a telegram came from Trins telling Sebastian that Linda's father was dangerously ill with sudden pneumonia; it urged that she should start at once if she would see him once again in life. The blow fell hard and sudden, for there had been nothing to suggest illness in the quiet and vigorous life of Doctor Caflisch, and Linda felt stunned and staggered. She gathered together some

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small possessions, Sebastian himself packing her clothes with feverish activity. He desired to go with her, but she begged him not to; he had got a chill from his Christmas revel, and even from Sebastian, as from everything else, her frightened soul desired escape.

It was pouring with rain as she drove away in a murky dawn to the station. The trees which the Chinese lanterns had so bravely lighted barely twenty-four hours since were dripping now in the winter deluge; the mud splashed up from the wheels of her carriage, and things looked grim and grey and void of any pagan splendour. Europe, too, looked grey and dreary, the fields of France all sodden and black; but after Basle the rain was exchanged for a heavy pall of snow; the great snows had been delayed that winter and they were falling now. Linda reached Chur late in the night, but she pushed on to Reichenau by sledge; there she took another sledge, and began the final stage of her journey in the silent, muffled cloak of the winter night. The man was unwilling to start; but realizing the necessity—Doctor Caflisch was dearly loved—he consented at last. He harnessed two strong horses to his little sledge, and they made what kind of progress they might up the steep mountain roadway.

It had been snowing for forty-eight hours on end, and every natural outline had been blurred and had disappeared beneath one heavy shroud. The forests were gathered together, the great boughs of the pines were joined into single pyramids level with the ground. The houses, the roads, the hedges and church-towers, all were huddled and moulded together under this heavy winter fall. And still the flakes came fluttering down in silent millions, down and down; and the lights on Linda's sledge showed only a curious curtained world. In spite of her sorrow, this snow-world soothed and even entranced her; and she lay back under her rugs breathing it in with an almost hypnotic sense of comfort and repose.

It was midnight when they drew into the village of Trins.

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The place seemed buried and dead; but a man with a spade and a lantern was in waiting by one of the first houses, another by the village inn. The doctor was dearly loved; they were looking for his daughter to come to him. They had cleared a narrow footpath to his house, and up this she passed in a dazed and dazzled silence. She saw her home with lights in the windows; she went up the steps and into the hall. A lamp was burning there, and one or two people stood around the stove; she asked no questions; she went up the stairs.

Her father was lying in her own room and on her mother's bed; her grandmother sat in the chair by his side, and Christina stood by the foot of the bed. Death was at hand. He was breathing painfully in hard, quick gasps, but he was watching, too. His eyes turned to meet his daughter, and she stood beside him perfectly still. She could not speak; she could not cry; she wanted his message and she knew he would give it. He had been the Truth to her all her life, the human life, and now he spoke.

"Go on being good," he said. "Never give way. . . . Be good like your mother. God will provide."

At this moment the door again opened, and Pfarrer Caflisch came in. He turned to the window and threw it farther open.

"Praise to God!" he cried with his wholesome, happy, abundant vitality. "He is gone home, our brother! Ah, Linda, father is gone home!"

Then Linda got up from her knees and looked long down on the dear, dead face. She turned to the door, and there she saw the old coat hanging, worn and threadbare as he had hung it up when he came in from working, with the pleurisy upon him. And then, but not till then, she wept, for it is ever the homely things which touch our human hearts. The splendour of the spirit world, revealed by death, had been an elevation too high for tears; but the old coat and the story which it told her, tore at her woman's

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heart. Long and long she sat by the bed, pressing the poor cold hands which had tended so many of the sorry wounds of Earth and her misguided children.

The doctor's lips were tightly closed, as so often they had been in life. In his death there was no going back and no reluctance.

"God will provide." That was his message.

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CHAPTER XXX

LONG AGO

"Thin, thin the pleasant human noises grow,
And faint the city gleams;
Rare the lone pastoral huts—marvel not thou!
The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,
But to the stars and the cold lunar beams;
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

So Linda had come back again, but to a homeless home. Her childish heart, though faithful in so many things, had been last spring estranged; and now she felt uprooted, adrift and rudderless upon the seas of life.

Two days later her father's body was laid in the earth. Every cloud had left the sky, the day was still, the sun shone quietly above the whitened world. The men of the village had worked in gangs for hours to clear a space in the churchyard big enough to hold a concourse of many people. Mary's grave had been laid bare, and into it they lowered now her husband's body. They sang the splendid Lutheran hymn which nineteen years before they had sung at Mary's burial; the solemn voices of the men, some low, some high, swelled forth in a kind of rugged comfort to the valley and the mountains up above. Great walls of snow, some four feet high, rose round the group beside the grave, and Linda's figure, small and upright, seemed to stand alone, and quite apart amidst the massive forms of the peasant men, and of the old peasant women in their rusty bonnets.

Some thoughtful hand had carefully laid the roots of the blush-roses which Mary's mother had so loved, and which

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her daughter had but carelessly tended as a child, in a little heap by the side of the double grave. Later in the evening, when the village was quiet and the sun had long since set, Linda herself came back and, with her own hands, planted the roses as best she could, covering them up with the frozen sods. Then night closed in upon the quiet valley, a night of stars and splendid planets, embosomed in a fathomless depth of blue. Linda as a child had loved the night; she loved it still, but with a deeper passion; for, young as she was, she had already realized the tangle and the struggle in which we somehow live, and from which there seems so little means of any real escape. The night holds Peace.

It was bitterly cold, but Linda sat in her heavy cloak on the bench by the doctor's door; she was thinking of very many things, and her thoughts were strange for one so young, so full of life and health, too. Why, she wondered, with so splendid a background to existence, should man and woman suffer so, be so beset with care, so full of strife and woe? Peace and plenty were everywhere; it was only from man's heart that the sorrowful conflict, the storms and the worries, came. From man did all ugliness, distress, and jealousies arise and spread for his own destruction.

Here in the winter night, God's night, there was calm profound; and there was beauty, too. Oh, but beauty beyond comparison!

The fountain in the square trickled slowly over the rounded cushions of solid grey ice; now and again a cow lowed in a neighbouring stall. Above the stars and the planets shone like splendid jewels: Sirius and Orion and the pale Pleides in all their glory; whilst the great mountains spread and reared their heads beneath those radiant orbs.

"God will provide," the doctor had said. And God had provided in noble measure for this one of His children—and yet; and yet . . .

In the weeks that followed, weeks of rearrangement and

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adjustment, Linda wrote various letters to Dudley. They were sad or they were gay; they were sometimes querulous; they were enough to puzzle any man, and certainly any ordinary English lover. She told him of her father's death and of the pain and loneliness it caused her; she dwelt upon the grandeur of her mountain home, and then she found fault with the harsh and sometimes material minds of its inhabitants. She told him of the doubts in her own mind, and then she said how she needed strength and human love. She wrote she was lonely, but also that she had "not enough to do." As a matter of fact, she was really exhausted by the strain of overmuch business coming so quick on the top of new and strong emotions. Such property as her father himself possessed was left entirely to his child, and there was all her mother's money to be transferred and settled once again.

These letters naturally fretted Dudley, for he was an Englishman and eminently consistent, whereas Linda was partly "foreign," and, whatever her nationality, no power could have made her consistent in his particular sense of that word.

In January Christina was married to her old lover. The marriage had long been arranged for that month, and there was no sort of reason for altering the dates. Linda had begged her grandmother to go on living in her first home, but the old lady could not bring herself to inhabit so large a house, and she had settled to join a brother and his wife who lived in the neighbouring parish, to which Christina had already migrated.

Thus, one by one, the links were broken which bound her to her childhood's home; and when her cousin, Pfarrer Caflisch, was offered the living of Trins, she was glad to fall in with his wishes and to accept his offer of renting her house. She only reserved the right to keep for herself her old room there. She then employed herself in sorting and arranging the beautiful, but scanty, furniture, and in put-

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ting things in order for the new owner. The answers from Dudley to her own strange letters began to come in slowly; he grew rather sulky in his style, for he was naturally tired of the girl's vagaries. He said he was sorry she should be so unhappy, but really it was not his fault, and he could not quite see why she clung so to Switzerland, for England was "very jolly," and he had never himself cared for "living abroad," and she herself "so often found fault with her Alpine neighbours."

Thus January passed to February, February glided into March. And one morning in early March something seemed to stir in the world outside, and to call for Linda to come out and join it. She put her papers carefully by, they were mostly all in order now; she told her maid she could go for the day to see her friends in another village; she shut the door behind her and she went down the valley road.

The forest was calling her; and the snows, which were about to break and to melt, they too were calling. The mountains were calling, and the lake and the forest, where she knew that the men had been going for days to cut the ice and carry it back to the village. She had put on her little old peasant frock, and the sealskin coat and the round sea-bird's cap which her mother had brought as a bride from England. She felt curiously happy. She was rested now, and although she was thinner, all her beauty had come back to her with a redoubled charm. Some sort of strange excitement stirred her blood as she left the village and passed up the road to the forest. It was early in the afternoon; the snow on the higher plateaux of the mountains glistened like silver or spun-glass; the round white clouds of the low-land spring came puffing and seething up from the unseen plains of Italy. There was a glory of gold in the valleys, with curious tints of pink and mauve, and faint opalescent greens. Indeed, there was a sense of the languor of Italy creeping, unseen, into the fastness of the Alps. But the frost had by no means broken, the signs of spring were all

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on the surface; the roads retained their winter coating, they were hard and firm if full of ruts and runnels. The snow lay thick over the summer hedgerows, and children were walking back from school on little paths which stood some five or six feet high above the natural surface of the meadows.

Linda went down the track which leads from the high-road through the forest to the lakes. As she passed between the tall white walls of snow she seemed but a very little figure indeed, yet there was so much dignity and detachment about her, that no one could pass her by unnoticed. She was young; she held her head up very high, and any expression of sadness was to-day overcome by the sense of pleasure in her surroundings.

Linda did not know at all that Basil was back in Trins, for no one had expected him; but he had come the evening before to his father's house, and the Emperor had at once put him on to a job: a job for which Basil was famous, namely that of the cutting of the ice on the lakes. His work was finished for the day; he had measured and cut the last great block of cobalt ice, and had given directions to his father's Knecht about the proper manner of packing it on the cart. He was now coming home on foot, to milk the cows and give them hay.

Basil did not start, he did not exclaim when suddenly he came on Linda. He just met her, watching her rather curiously, and a smile came up and stayed on his lips.

"You've come to see us cut the ice?" he said. "I've finished myself for to-day; I'm going home now to milk the cows." Then, as she did not speak, he added quietly: "You may be well, but you are grown smaller and thinner. Why not ride on my cart?"

"Yes," she said, "I'm grown smaller—and thinner. But I won't ride on the cart. I'll walk with you; I want to see you milking."

They walked together up through the forest and home

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again by the road. They might have been utter strangers; they talked of quite small things. When they came to the door of the stables Linda hesitated.

"You'd best go home," said Basil. "It's hot in the stable, and you'd be chilled with the coming in and out again."

"But I always stayed for the milking!" she protested.

"That was long ago, and people change," remarked the peasant.

Linda felt a secret longing to go with Basil into the warm stables—to see him milk and tend his cows. The cows loved Basil so, she could hear them lowing as he entered; the scent of the hay in the barn above came out and seemed to soothe and call her.

But Basil had changed and life had changed—things were certainly "long ago."

Linda went round to the back of the stables and to the wooden steps which led to the barn. The sun was already setting in the valley, although it was barely three o'clock. There was a light in the higher ranges, and the forests seemed very near, so that each separate pine-tree stood out black and clean on the snow-line. It was a wonderful, perfect, clean white world. As far as the human eye could travel there was nothing ugly, or dirty, or vulgar—no dust or brick, no soot, no squalor.

Linda sat down on the steps which led from the meadow up to the back of the barn. The big doors of the barn were closed behind her, but she could smell the scent of the hay inside, and she knew exactly of what it was made—the arnicas, the vanilla orchises, and the white moon daisies, which once had been so brilliant and which now were dry and withered, but wholesome still and sweetly-scented. It was a sheltered corner; huge drifts throughout that heavy winter had accumulated into natural walls some dozen feet or so in height. Linda sat there thinking. It was evident that Basil, the friend of her childhood, did not want her.

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Things were certainly long ago, and she herself had greatly altered. She rose from her seat and gathered her thoughts together. The valley was now in complete shadow, but there was a glow on the sides of the hills, and the topmost crags stood out in orange light on the pallid hazy sky. A desire to shake off a growing torpor seized on Linda's heart, and to bring her old self back again by revisiting some haunt of her childhood, dim and far away as that childhood now appeared. Therefore she struck away from the village, and turned up a hay-track which led through the forest along the mountain-side.

A little thin wind blew over the snow-fields, but there was a glory of gold and of crimson on every mountain-peak far as the eye could traverse, for the plateau to which she had ascended projected high above the valley, and commanded a singular view of the distant peaks of the Oberland.

Up on that plateau, where the snow had settled into mighty drifts, there was a small wooden châlet belonging to Basil's father, the Emperor. As children, she and Basil had often been together there; she went now gently, and almost fearfully, up to this châlet, and she climbed to the top of a wooden ledge and searched beneath the eaves. She remembered something; she felt sure that it must be here, and here in fact she found it. On the rough surface of a sunbaked beam of larch, two hearts had once been rudely carved. They were still visible, though burned by many summer suns to a deep shade of brown. Ten summer suns, ten winter moons, had smiled or wept upon those faint, rude symbols of a boy's romance.

Linda looked narrowly, then started back. The hearts were there, but things were changed; an arrow was struck through one of them; the other had been in part effaced. These additions to the original design were not burnt brown, but shone out pale and sickly, like unhealed scars on the heart of the darker wood.

"Ah!" said the girl, "I see." She drew her fingers

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across the silly wooden symbols, as though to test so crude a demonstration of a peasant's broken love. Then she got down and walked from the shelter of the barn and into the winter world again.

A load seemed somehow lifted, and yet another load was left behind, a human load. She ran along the plateau, and as she ran she sang aloud, "Behüt dich Gott"; she sang, "Es wär zu schön gewesen. Behüt dich Gott, es hat nicht sollen sein."

Twilight was creeping over the world, and with its shade the feeble rays of a very young moon were faintly fighting. The lights of evening were dissolving into an indefinite harmony of darkness, such a harmony as no painter could ever paint or keep. A thin wind ran along the ground, hurrying and sifting the sandy snow into the girl's light footprints. She looked down the mountain-side up which she first had climbed; it was long and gently winding. She went back to the châlet and found there a little sledge she had often used as a child, and soon she was shooting forward down the mountain-side some hundreds of feet across the frozen surface. The cold air whizzed and whistled behind her, the snows whirled up and almost choked her.

No one saw her and no one cared; the little brown girl was back again in the heart of the strong unchanging mountains; she was free of all emotion—she was free even of herself. . . .

For just that moment peace and a sense of completed joys enfolded her.

When at last she returned to the village, it was almost dark. The place felt quiet and cold and sad beyond memory. The peasant houses had grown grey, sordid, and chilly, and the paths round the human habitations seemed things more frozen and cruel than any ravine on the mountains up above them. Scarcely a wreath of smoke arose from the scattered chimneys. The village seemed dead,

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and grey, and bare, and Linda hurried in silence past the silent houses; her face was flushed by the wind of the heights, her hair had loosened in curls across her forehead.

As she came to her own door she saw a figure standing waiting, and she knew quite well it was Basil.

"Oh, it's you," she said.

"Yes, it's me," he said, "but I'll not come in. . . . I've only come to say good-bye. I'm going again to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" she said, "and where are you going?"

"I'm going to Naples," he answered. Then very suddenly, and with curious rude decision, he added: "You don't know Ursula Planta—but I'll be marrying her this summer-time."

He turned on his heel, and he left her.

Linda pushed open the door of her old home. It seemed to fall back on its hinges with a lifeless swing, as though the house had long been empty. No light was in the passage, none in the room. There was a curious sense of the spirits of the house having left it. Linda went up to the table, struck a match and lighted the small oil-lamp. Only one letter had come by the evening post—a letter from India.

She opened and read it, there where she stood.

"After all," wrote Dudley, "the regiment is ordered home, and we shall have started before this reaches you. . . . I am afraid that I may have been cross in my last letters, but I couldn't understand all your ups and your downs; I know you have had a lot of worry, and perhaps I ought to have understood you better. You mustn't stay on alone at Trins; you are not fit for it. And then, of course, I want you very much. I can't give you up. I dare say it's my fault, but I can't quite understand you. But I love you, and I think you do love me? Isn't that enough? You said that you loved me; you never said you did not love me. I don't really know what it was you said, because I could not follow it very clearly. But it worried me, and at last you made me angry, so that I dare say I wrote back something I need not have done. But let me come back to look after you, and I won't bother to understand. I will only just love you—— Tell

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me to come straight to Trins and to fetch you. Just write a line to meet me at our landing. . . . I may have said something you did not like about your Swiss home and your father's people. But just think of all the things you are always saying about England! And I never really got angry with you about that—did I? Well, I can't say more than this—except, I thought I might as well tell you that, although we are ordered back now to England, we shan't probably stay there long. We might even go with the regiment to Egypt, or to some other place that you would like lots better. But, anyhow, I don't want to have to go away again without you. I am thinking about you all the time. So do write to meet me when I land. It's Southampton, remember, *and don't put the wrong address.*"

Dudley had underlined the last sentence, taking a ruler to make the line perfectly straight. (This deed was prophetic, trifling as it seemed.) Dudley was a very illiterate young man, but he could write a sort of a love-letter, for the simple reason that he allowed his heart and thoughts, such as they were, to speak up plainly. He was not hurried about by any spark of outward emotion; there was, for the moment, one perfectly clear point in his manhood's vision, and it was just this point which he expressed with so much repetition in the letter.

Linda stood by the table thinking. . . .

How cold the room was! How lonely everything seemed to be. . . . "Regiments!"—life controlled by the movements of an English regiment! . . . Dudley was thinking about her—Dudley said he wanted her back. Basil was going to Naples. . . . She felt pretty sure, by the way in which Basil had watched her eyes, that he never would marry Ursula Planta. Basil had been firm and cruel. But that did not matter—it was not to the point whether Basil married or did not marry, that was not the question that troubled her now. . . .

Dudley was "always thinking" about her. . . . She knew by now that men were thinking of women, and women of men. But for a permanence? . . . for a thing which must go on always? Some words which von Herder loved to repeat came back on her ear about those "other

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and fairer Galateas." But still she was lonely, and Love is warm. . . . It is long to be lonely—but Life is very long too?

Linda went on thinking. She thought of many people, but she thought much more of natural things—of beautiful, silent, glowing things which never can harm one, which never can fit with the sometimes cruel endeavour of men and of women; and of "regiments"—last of all with the wrong of regiments and all that regiments stand for. . . . She thought of the materially minded people—talking, talking, very "busy"; killing, too, and hurting by their too much talk and "doing." . . . She thought of the beautiful people with great suffering hearts who were hurt themselves, and who tried to help and to heal one. . . . She thought of the trees up there on the frozen hillsides . . . and of how they go on growing, for hundreds and hundreds of years, up there on the frozen hillsides. She thought of the stars. . . . There was one star shining at her window now, just where the sunset had faded. Her mother and her father had seen it through that same window-pane. . . . How different her mother and her father were to her? . . . It had shone there thousands and millions of years ago. . . . She thought of the places which men and women did not disturb, . . . heavenly places where the flowers grow and where the little fresh waters trickle through the meadows. She thought of cathedrals—good men had built them. She thought of old wooden inns and of barns—alone—alone. Oh! the glory and the peace of being alone.

But Love is warm? She thought of the lovers on warm June nights, of mothers and quite young children. She thought of the fuss of emotions, and of death—so quiet; and of life, so full and flurried. No wonder men needed the Peace of religion, with life so full and flurried. . . .

She turned to the wall, and there she saw the portraits hanging. How stiff and how tired the people looked! . . .

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She went to the shelf, and she took down her mother's bible. She read a little French quotation which was written at the end of her mother's bible:

"J'appris à espérer au lieu de regretter; à donner au lieu de prendre; à aider au lieu de me plaindre. J'appris à regarder en haut, non en bas, devant moi, non en arrière; aussi ma route fut plus facile, et mes pieds moins las."

She turned the page. She read a verse from the thirty-first psalm written in the cramped and hurried hand of her own mother's mother:

"Thou shalt hide them privily by Thine own presence from the provoking of all men. Thou shalt keep them secretly in Thy tabernacle from the strife of tongues."

And then another piece in that same curious writing taken from some old mystic:

"The Soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new Light through chinks which Time has made."

All these people through Love, through Experience, but finally only through Suffering, had found their souls. She put the book back on the shelf again. She took her pen and a piece of paper, and very slowly and very distinctly she wrote a letter to Dudley.

What was it that Linda had written? . . .

She sealed the letter with the seal of her mother who had died. She left the room, she passed down the street, and she dropped the letter into the post-box. She heard the thud of the letter in the post-box, and then she looked up at the sky again, and she noticed the splendid belt of Orion, steadfast, immutable, indifferent to our human loves and fates, yet somehow beckoning onward.

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AFTER FIVE YEARS

"Bis die Bergen thun sich beugen,
Und die Hügel senken sich:
Bis der Tod mir nimmt das Leben,
So lang will ich lieben dich."
From an Old Swiss Song.

THE slight and delicate figure of a woman was moving up the path which leads to the Arora Alp. It was Linda, but she had greatly altered. There was a new and strange nobility about her. Her face was very pale indeed. It was that of one to whom life's anguish, perhaps some sense of human treachery, had been too early, too irrevocably, revealed ever to be effaced. There was, indeed, a trace of the old gladness in her mouth; but her eyes were not the old eyes one remembered; they held an expression of renunciation rather than of actual pain or struggle; and this expression, being so foreign to her nature, could only have been wrung from her by some deep form of mental anguish.

Linda did not actually know it, but her struggle with the question of Life was over. Whatever tears and sorrow might yet be coming her way—and by what sensitive nature can these things be avoided?—she, the woman, had learned and overcome; and through the patient endurance of a thing which must have been to her some almost intolerable strain and even humiliation, she had emerged and got away from her own old wayward egotisms. Linda was out on the quiet seas at length; the tempest of queries and of discontent were buried away and behind her.

She moved very slowly up the hill, partly because she had been very ill, but also because there was no sort of

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thing to make her hurry. To her it seemed that time itself was over. This was a long summer's day; the nights of winter were as long too. All were measured to her by some great physical weariness.

As she passed through the wood she saw where the moss and the linnæa borealis grew. And one by one she recognized those lovely things which, as a child, she had so cared for, but which to-day, because of her great listlessness, she glanced at and passed by.

How many, many years ago it seemed since she, as a very little child, had passed up this same woodland way on that hot July morning with her aunt. She had lingered then to play amongst the world of moss and boulders, and after that she had gone on into the sunlight of the Alp and had dabbled in the mountain lake, bare-legged, bare-headed, in the splendid sunlight. Her long plaits had then become unpinned and dipped into the sunny water. The air had shimmered all around her with the shimmering delight of summer and of youth; and so it would shimmer still to-day if only her heart were young.

Linda came up to the shepherds' huts, and she went through the open door of the Emperor's châlet. Up on the shelf above the table a little old book of folk-songs stood, the leaf turned down as Basil surely turned it all those years ago.

She went to the shelf and she took down the book.

> "Ach wär ich nur geblieben auf meinen Heiden!
> Da hätt ich nichts gewust von all den Leiden,"

was what she read, for there the leaves fell easily apart.

She put down the book, and then she suddenly started. She had left the front door open behind her. It was not the poem that made her start, it was something very different.

Basil was coming down the mountain-side and singing. She heard his voice—there was no other voice like Basil's.

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Unfamiliar as it had grown to her for many years, she knew it well. Involuntarily she turned, and her pulses throbbed; they had been so dead and quiet these last months in Italy, and England.

Linda went out through the door and into the sunlight of the little Alpine meadow. She wore a plain mourning gown; but her long loose cloak, with all its heavy folds, could not conceal the emaciation of her slender figure. Round her neck was the golden chain and the cross which Sebastian had given to her mother long ago. She had taken off her hat, and the sun poured full on her little head with all its heavy crown of hair. Her face had grown so small and pale that only an artist or a lover could detect its inextinguishable beauty nowadays.

Linda did not know that she was waiting. She imagined that she had ceased to wait for anything which could concern herself. She did not wonder what had brought her here, or why it was that she had come to these old haunts at all. The place did not seem any longer hers. She loved it well, but it, and her old, better self, had altered and grown dim. She was living in a dream—a dream such as some dead man might dream were he himself quite conscious still, and yet his body lying there amongst the living people.

Suddenly she looked up, for Basil was standing beside her, gazing at her.

"You've come back," was all he said.

Again she started. Had he seemed surprised to see her, had he turned away or hurt her by any ordinary greeting, she might have gone on moving through her dreams. But this old comment, this quiet statement, startled all her being.

"Come back," she repeated.

Basil was the Emperor of Trins now, and a very great man in the peasant world, for he had inherited large properties both in Italy and the Engadine as well as that

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of his father in Trins. He took his seat a little away from her. He wore his old grey working clothes, the same thick homespun coat, the flannel shirt, the clumsy nickel watch-chain. Little pieces of hay and moss clung about him, for he had been up on the mountain-side nearly all this summer's day. Basil had more than ever the look of belonging to the mountains. There was something like the mountains themselves about him; he was large and calm, impenetrable and grand. His skin was one deep glowing bronze, his hair rose dark and curling from his low and quiet forehead.

Linda looked at him a little, but soon she turned away; and a grief which was almost unbearable shot to her heart.

"Do you remember?" she began, and hardly knowing what she said.

"I don't remember many things," he answered, "but there are some I don't forget."

"I was trying to remember," she said, "how I used to come here when I was young."

"When you were young," he repeated very slowly, and he smiled.

"Yes," she said, "I remember only a very little about when I was young."

"That I haven't forgotten," he said, and he still smiled. "I've not had to remember it," he added in the strange, enigmatical voice peculiar to peasants when they jest.

But she scarcely heard him, and she did not understand him. An intense sadness was over all her spirit. She found it difficult to speak. The sunlight dazzled her, for her eyes were full of tears. She put up her hands and rested her elbows on her knees; but the tears fell through her fingers and he saw them. Again he smiled. Indeed, his face grew suddenly radiant. When he had smiled before there was a touch of bitterness about him; now, nothing but pure joy was in his eyes. He came a little nearer her.

"I have never had to remember," he said, very slowly, "because to me thou wast, and always wilt be, young—

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young and the same. Things changed, and other people tried to change thee. . . . But that which was between thee and me—that thing they never changed."

"Oh, Basil!" she said, starting to her feet, "Basil, be still! I have a hundred things to tell you—all my life since then and now. It's years, and years, and years, remember!"

As she spoke she caught her breath, and then she looked up to the mountain-side, and back to the Alp, and down to the valleys. This world with all its splendour dazzled her.

"Oh! will you not listen to me, Basil?" she said.

"Listen to what?" he asked again. His face was calm and radiant.

"To this, to this," she answered hurriedly, and gathering as it were her thoughts together. "We were children together, you and I. You belong to all the best things that I know. I loved them then—I love them now. But still I left them. You always told me I should be a fool to leave them. But it seemed somehow as though I had to go, and as though everything and everybody had to come between us—you and me. You were different, you stayed on here; you grew into your mountains. But I allowed myself to be torn up. I was torn up by other things and people, and I went away. I did so many things. I saw so many things and people. I came back once when my father died. But then I went away again; and I seemed to forget the mountains, and how it was they who had given me life, and not the things and not the people to whom my soul seemed going out. Dudley died, you know, in that campaign in India. He loved to rule; it was his nature. And other people came and went. Some of them were kind and good and beautiful. Others—oh, Basil dear! even the people whom this world calls 'good'—they, too, can be very small, self-satisfied, and even cruel. And one can be lonely amongst them, quite, *quite* alone, rather than know and be injured by them. They take all—they give one nothing back . . . nothing. But how can I put

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it all in words? So many things, so many people. . . . I've had so many friends, and things, and people. And the more I gave to all of these, the more I seemed to turn from the old life and from the better things and people—the more . . ." she broke off suddenly; then: "I too love goodness best," she said. "I've always only wanted to be good; but many did not understand—they tried to teach and force one. . . . I seem to have forgotten how to laugh," she said.

And then quite suddenly and strangely she smiled—one of the happy smiles she had so often smiled in childhood.

"Have you done?" he said, and he trembled as he looked into her eyes.

Good men love noble women with ideals—base men deride, because they fear them. Basil was a good man. He gazed on this most dear and saddened woman with passionate intentness one long moment; then he spoke again. And every word came straight from that strong heart with which, through all the moments of his mortal life, he had loved her.

"I let thee know so long ago I loved thee. If that were enough for thee, it is enough for me too."

And more than that he did not say, for the words were the essence of his heart, his sure philosophy, and his life's aims.

But she stood still, summoning all the forces of her soul. "Basil," she said, and her voice was low and infinitely tender, "Basil, knowing all these things about me, how could you have gone on loving me?"

"Knowing what?" said Basil.

"Why, all the things that I have told you—surely I have told you much?"

"No, Linda," he answered quietly, "you have not told me very much, or if you have I did not understand you. But I did not try to follow all you said."

His face had grown a little pale. He had the tired look which people have when they attempt to follow thoughts

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which mean but little to themselves, but which are vital to those who are dear to them.

And then a light came into Linda's eyes.

"Basil," she said, "listen again."

He got up and leant against the wooden paling. The sun was setting full in his eyes. Tall plants of monkshood grew to his knees, and quantities of very blue forget-me-nots were round his feet. His cows were coming up the path; one smelt their sweet warm breath. His hay was standing high and full of blood-red sorrel flowers below them in the meadows; another week and they would cut it. Far away, down in the valley, the shadows were growing longer; one heard the horses' bells upon the road, a hum of grasshoppers in every field. Somewhere in many dreary English cities, there was dust of coal and hurry of crowded feet. Somewhere respectable persons were drinking tea in drawing-rooms. Here, in the mountain world, there was peace—a peace more certain and profound than that of men in their tallest cathedrals.

Basil belonged to the mountains. The calmness of their heights was his, the splendour of their summer nights, the rigours of their winter snowstorms. An immense—an immovable strength was in his eyes.

"Linda," he said very slowly, "they taught thee foolish things. They wished to make thee dull and hateful like themselves. *They made thee sad, but oh, I know they could not make thee sinful.* . . . They wanted thy mind, they wanted thy money; they nearly spoiled thy beauty. But thy dear heart they never wanted, and thy dear soul they gave thee back in tatters. They taught thee to think when thou shouldst have been living; they taught thee to grow old before thy time, and tired. But they did not love thee; and I—I love thee. It is thee I need, and not thy thoughts and follies. It is thee as I used to know thee that I have wanted all the years. "Linda," he said suddenly and with profound conviction. "It's me thou needest too."

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He drew a little nearer, but he did not touch her. He did not even for that moment look into her eyes. He went on gazing straight into the sunlight, and she saw how every line upon his face was firm and healthful, and that there was no contradiction, no mere compromising there.

"My father and my mother are dead," he said; "they left me a lot of land and cattle. My sisters both are married. . . . There's little changed in our house," he said, "but I've got so many more cows and goats that I had to build fresh stables. There are still the yellow hens and pigeons, Linda," he went on—"you always said you loved the yellow pigeons. And I've bought another field for flax—you always liked fine linen. Then Uncle Christopher died, you know, and he left me all his lands in Italy. There's an old villa there, built long ago for one of the Castile ladies. It's got a garden full of herbs and bay-trees and old fountains. I know you'd love the garden, Linda, and so would your Uncle Sebastian."

As Basil went on speaking, wonderful waves of a thing which was neither joy nor passion, which was rather the peace of a pure affection mixed with some mystical exaltation, came into Linda's heart and stayed there.

Truly, this strong mountain man had understood her pain and all her need and sense of failure more truly than any of the clever doctors. With no soul dissection, with few words and fearless truths, he had touched the tenderest corners of her brain and healed her aching heart. She listened to his quiet words, and long after he was silent she seemed to hear him still. And then dear visions rose before her. She saw the little old villa down on the Lombard plain, where the oleanders and pomegranates grew; she saw the gourds and the crimson capsicums hanging in thick garlands round the eaves on late September evenings; she saw the great white oxen swinging slowly by. . . . But more than these, she saw the Emperor's house at Trins; she saw it as young women see their homes . . . she saw

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the flax on the spinning-wheel, and the cows within their stables; she saw the brown bowls standing full of cream. She saw small children sleeping in the panelled rooms when the great winter snows were falling on the mountains all outside them. . . .

Her cloak had fallen from her shoulders to the ground, and as Basil took her in his arms the sun went down in glowing splendour, and cool calm shadows crept over the mountain-sides.

A little later the snow-line glowed with a crimson glow, and then came night, and stars; and the unchanging planets.

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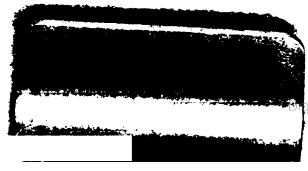

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